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COMMUNICATION IN THE RUINS:  
WALKER PERCY AND THE ART OF SYMBOLIC MEDIATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Justin N. Bonanno

August 2020

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Justin N. Bonanno

2020

COMMUNICATION IN THE RUINS:  
WALKER PERCY AND THE ART OF SYMBOLIC MEDIATION

By

Justin N. Bonanno

Approved July 10, 2020

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## ABSTRACT

### COMMUNICATION IN THE RUINS: WALKER PERCY AND THE ART OF SYMBOLIC MEDIATION

By

Justin N. Bonanno

August 2020

Dissertation supervised by Ronald C. Arnett

This dissertation proposes to explore the mediating function of the symbol through the work of Walker Percy. In the first chapter, I provide the necessary background for undertaking this project. First, I situate Percy in his historical moment and review key events in his life that helped to shape his philosophy of communication. Second, I sketch out some of the primary coordinates in Percy's thought. Percy's hermeneutic of the self requires an understanding of the difference between sign and symbol, dyadic and triadic events, environment and world, and immanence and transcendence. Third, I review some of the key intersections with Percy's work and the field of communication. Percy responded to several schools of thought important to the field of communication, including information theory, General Semantics, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and the New Rhetoric. Several voices within the field of communication also drew upon Percy's work in topic areas such as rhetoric,

communication ethics, philosophy of communication, media ecology, and communication pedagogy. The final section of the first chapter provides a preview of the chapters to come. The second chapter covers the glories of symbol use, which follow from the successful mediation of existence. In the third chapter, I review the shadow side of symbolic mediation, which occurs when individuals encounter symbols instead of existence, leading to alienation and solipsism. The fourth and final chapter investigates the means for escaping from symbolically induced alienation and, paradoxically, makes a case for the importance of non-symbolic phenomena. Altogether, this dissertation aims to solidify the importance of Percy's work for the field of communication, especially his philosophical realism, which subverts the temptation to idealism faced by scholars of rhetoric and communication.

## DEDICATION

To my wife, Anna

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## Chapter 1: Introduction, Coordinates, and Chapter Preview

Everyone has had that awful sensation of knowing the right word for something and yet struggling to utter it aloud. And everyone knows the glorious release from having discovered the right word hitherto at the tip of their tongue. Scientists, for example, patiently observe natural phenomena looking to name what lies before them. Try to imagine the feeling felt by the first marine biologist to have identified that elongated slimy thing as an “eel.” “What is *that*? An *eel*!” Authors, too, must grope their way through a manuscript, stretching for the appropriate noun or verb, participle or adjective. All too often, writers describe the sensation of being moored in the sea of language, writer’s block, unable to take flight and articulate themselves. A terrible tension follows from the inability to remember names, even (and perhaps especially) of other people. Imagine a group of students sitting before you early in the semester, undifferentiated by their names. Who is who? Recall the embarrassment of someone who has called you by the wrong name. In my own case, I have been called “Jason” on many occasions by priests, relatives, and acquaintances alike, even though my real name is “Justin.” I do not hold this against them. If anything, I am usually embarrassed by their embarrassment. Why might anxiety follow from the inability to name something? Why does embarrassment follow from using the wrong word? And why might pronouncing the right word (or hearing another find the right word) lead to elation and a sense of release? Such questions, which exemplify the crossing of the semiotic and the existential, lie at the heart of Walker Percy’s investigation into the symbol’s capacity to mediate existence, the subject of this dissertation.

In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation. First, I introduce the reader to Walker Percy and his historical moment. Second, I work through Percy’s works and identify some primary coordinates in his thought. Third, I situate Walker Percy’s work in the

communication literature. Finally, I preview the forthcoming chapters in the dissertation. Ultimately, this dissertation traces the contours of the mediating function of the symbol. What does the symbol mediate? Existence. Investigating the capacity of symbols to mediate existence also raises the question as to what happens when symbols cease to mediate: a host of problematic existential conditions, not the least of which includes solipsism. The joys of discovering a symbolically mediated world also imply phenomenological degeneration, the shadow side of language use. Thus, I seek to answer the following questions, “What implications follow from the symbolic capacity to mediate existence? What happens when symbols fail to mediate existence?” This dissertation seeks to acknowledge the importance of the symbol without falling into the idealist trap of reducing all existence to mere symbolic phenomena. Existence both precedes and transcends the realm of the symbol. Thus, I embark on this dissertation with realist presuppositions.

This dissertation’s interest in mediation will impinge primarily upon rhetoric, the philosophy of communication, and media ecology. While certain voices in the field of communication have taken an interest in Percy, for the most part, communication scholars have only scratched the surface regarding everything that Percy has to offer. Communication scholars have hinted at the ontological and epistemic importance of metaphor in Percy’s work, but a more thorough investigation of the “symbol” (and its potential to mediate existence) would support and extend these scholarly analyses (e.g., Campbell; Caraher; Cleary; Engnell; Lessl; Osborn and Ehninger). Above all, communication scholars could benefit from an appreciation of Percy’s realism (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 235). Idealist and materialist investigations into communication may capture important aspects of communicative phenomena. And yet, both fail to capture the entirety of the symbolic event.

### *Situating Percy in the Historical Moment*

In this section, I review Percy's life within his historical moment. As a young man, Percy experienced tragedy that would orient the rest of his life. Percy first turned to science for answers to life's deepest questions. But as Percy matured, he turned toward religion and eventually converted to Catholicism. Ultimately, this section seeks to understand Percy as a diagnostician of the ills of modernity, especially the problematic project of the autonomous self. Percy studied medicine, wrote novels, and philosophized about the nature of communication. Entire biographies on Percy, especially those written by Tolson and Samway, provide detailed and rich portraits of Percy. Here I seek to foreground only those aspects of Percy salient to my project: his rejection of scientism, his reading of Continental and American philosophy, his conversion to Catholicism, and his responsive disposition toward the exigences of his time.

It is difficult to understand Percy apart from his tragic, Southern background. Born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1916, Percy was the oldest of three brothers. Percy's other brothers were born shortly after him, LeRoy Pratt in 1917 and Billups Phinizy (or Phin, as his family called him) in 1922. The Percy family legacy "acquired mythical or at least legendary dimensions" in the South (Tolson 24). Percy came from a long line of soldiers, lawyers, and men of honor. Percy's paternal great grandfather, William Alexander Percy, nicknamed the "Gray Eagle of the Delta," served as a soldier in the Confederate army during the Civil War (Tolson 25). Percy's grandfather, also named Walker Percy, worked as a lawyer and suffered from severe depression, ultimately killing himself in 1917 (Tolson 25, 31-32). As George Waring Ball wrote in his diary, "Tragedy pursues the Percy family like Nemesis" (Ball as qtd. in Tolson 99). Percy's father, LeRoy Pratt, also a lawyer, committed suicide in 1929 (Tolson 44-45, 73). After a brief stint living in Athens, Georgia, with Percy's maternal grandmother, Percy, his mother, and

his two brothers went to live with his uncle, William Alexander Percy (“Uncle Will”), in Greenville, Mississippi (Tolson 46-47). Percy’s mother, Martha Susan Phinizy, drowned after driving her car off a bridge only a few years later (Tolson 98). After the death of his father and mother, Percy’s Uncle Will adopted Walker and his two brothers. Concerning Uncle Will’s influence, Tolson explains Uncle Will’s “values and outlook” as “the first and greatest spur to his [Percy’s] writing at all” (Tolson 149). Uncle Will—a lawyer, planter, and former WWI infantry officer—wrote poetry and appreciated the arts, inviting figures such as William Faulkner and Harry Stack Sullivan over to his house. The literary genius of Percy’s Uncle Will, as well as Percy’s childhood friend Shelby Foote, would inspire Percy throughout the entirety of his life (Tolson 83). Percy’s tragic upbringing would lead him to question the ability of science and technology to answer life’s most pressing questions. Existential phenomena such as anxiety, despair, suicide, and death required something more than science and the prevailing conventional wisdom could offer. Further, darkness in the Percy family reflected the larger shadow cast over the post-religious, technological age that Percy found himself in, a persistent theme in his writings.

Before turning to the Catholic Church for answers, however, Percy invested his faith in science. Tolson relates that Percy looked for “certainties” in high school, finding them in an “exaggerated faith in science that is called scientism” (Tolson 96). After high school, Percy went to the University of North Carolina, where he was first exposed to behaviorism (Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land* 382; Tolson 128-129). Upon graduation from UNC, Percy made his way to Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons to study pathology (Tolson 132, 148). Percy’s work in pathology put him in touch with cadavers, one of which contaminated him with tuberculosis. In August 1942, Percy departed for Trudeau Sanatorium in Saranac Lake, NY,

to recover from the illness (Tolson 161-166). Tolson suggests that Percy read Kierkegaard's essay "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" while recuperating at Trudeau (Tolson 174). According to Percy, Kierkegaard's essay was decisive in his eventual conversion to Catholicism. Percy confessed, "If I had to single out one piece of writing which was more responsible than anything else for my becoming a Catholic, it would be that essay of Kierkegaard's" (Dewey 110). Later, in the early 1950s, Percy would begin to read other existentialists more extensively, whose influence on Percy I sketch out below (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 106; Tolson 174-183, 238). Nevertheless, Percy also discovered the work of Susanne Langer, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and the Church Fathers during his time at Saranac Lake (Samway, "Grappling" 37; Tolson 174, 237). Langer had discovered something that would preoccupy Percy for the rest of his life: the unique and unprecedented capacity for human beings to use symbols to communicate with others. As for the Catholic philosophers, Percy read Aquinas and Augustine so that he might better debate a Catholic friend of his, Art Fortugno (Tolson 174, 198). It appears as though Providence placed various Catholic friends throughout Percy's life, friends who eventually turned Percy toward the Church (Tolson 156). Friendship has a strange way of opening the heart to what another has to say (Weil, *The Need for Roots* 205). While not converting at first, Percy began attending Mass with Fortugno (Tolson 175). Percy eventually received instruction in the Catholic faith from the Jesuits at Loyola University in New Orleans (Tolson 198-202). Percy had married by this time, and his wife, Bunt, accompanied him on his journey into the Church (Tolson 201). Despite his conversion to Catholicism, Percy never lost his appreciation of the true merits of science. Like the poet, the scientist discovers being through the mediation of the symbol (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 196-

197). The danger, Percy knew, lies in scientists' and technicians' unwillingness to acknowledge any limits on what science and technology can accomplish.

Despite his training in medicine, Percy turned to writing novels, reviews, and philosophical essays. A substantial inheritance from his Uncle Will allowed Percy the leisure to write (Tolson 166). Furthermore, Percy could read and write while recovering from tuberculosis (Tolson 182, 196-197). All the while, Percy's childhood friend (and fellow novelist) Shelby Foote would critique and comment upon Percy's writings (Tolson 197). Percy spent roughly six years teaching himself how to write fiction before he began to write nonfiction essays in 1954 (Tolson 211). Percy wrote two "apprentice" novels, *The Charterhouse* and *The Gramercy Winner*, both of which were never published. *The Charterhouse*, like Percy's later novels, involved a confused young protagonist searching for meaning in life (Tolson 215). *The Gramercy Winner* tells the story of Will Grey, another searcher (Tolson 230). As per Tolson, Percy sought to write about the "initiation into a Christian comic vision of truth rather than a tragic one" (230). After failing to publish these two apprentice novels, Percy wrote *The Moviegoer*, which won the National Book Award in 1962. In *The Moviegoer*, the protagonist Binx Bolling seeks to overcome despair and malaise. Kierkegaard's philosophy especially influenced *The Moviegoer*. As Lawson argues, *The Moviegoer* depicts Binx Bolling's transition from the aesthetic to the ethical modes of existence (Lawson 870, 889). After winning the National Book Award, Percy wrote five more novels, including *The Last Gentleman* (1966), *Love in the Ruins* (1971), *Lancelot* (1977), *The Second Coming* (1980), and *The Thanatos Syndrome* (1987). Percy used the medium of the novel to convey philosophical ideas to a large audience, especially in an age beset by scientism and the reign of technology over everyday life. Percy, well aware of his audience's recalcitrance regarding "deep" religious or philosophical



ideas, sought indirect means for conveying larger religious and philosophical truths. While Percy has primarily been remembered as a novelist, Percy thought that posterity would remember him for his work in the philosophy of communication, which I expand upon further below (Gulledge 285; see Lawler 97).

In addition to writing novels and philosophical essays, Percy busied himself with other projects, too. Percy's conversion to Catholicism granted him a new perspective on racial issues (Tolson 203-204). Originally a segregationist, Percy would later argue against segregation and advocate for racial justice. In "Stoicism in the South," Percy compares the tragic inadequacies of Stoicism with the hopeful possibilities of Christianity; the Christian cannot sit idle and remain complicit in the face of racial injustice (Percy, "Stoicism in the South"). Other essays, including "A Southern View" and "The Southern Moderate," argue for a reconciliation between North and South over the issue of race (Percy, "The Southern Moderate" 96; Percy, "A Southern View" 92). Like a good Kierkegaardian, Percy knew that real Christians did not have the luxury of simply waiting for the hereafter but had to work out their faith with "fear and trembling" (Collins 13-17). Not content with remaining in the realm of speculation, Percy translated his ideas into ethical practices. Beginning in 1968, Percy joined the Community Relations Council of Greater Covington, which sought to heal the divide between black and white communities (Tolson 347). During his tenure with the Council, Percy served on the education committee, which established a local Head Start program and day-care center. Percy himself drove buses for the program due to problems finding and paying for drivers (Tolson 347). Further, Percy helped start a credit union to help African Americans obtain loans for starting businesses or buying homes (Tolson 347-348). Beyond racial issues, Percy also held a lifelong interest in (and skepticism toward) psychiatry, given its focus on existential issues and philosophical questions like the relationship

between the mind and the body (Tolson 311). Psychiatrists, according to Percy, had to somehow account for the human person as a peculiar creature with a desire for religious transcendence (Percy, “The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry”). Percy’s writings on the philosophy of communication led Gentry Harris, a psychiatrist, to seek out Percy for help in understanding schizophrenia. Beginning in 1963, Percy consulted with Harris on specific cases of schizophrenic patients and their families (Tolson 312). As Tolson writes, “Percy’s job was to read and decode the linguistic performance of various members of a special ‘intersubjective’ community” (Tolson 312). Percy warned Harris about the schizophrenic’s proclivity to assume unhelpful scientific categories of understanding as well as the schizophrenic’s deficient use of language (Tolson 319). Finally, in addition to occupying his time responding to exigences in civil rights and psychiatry, Percy spent time as a teacher. Percy taught courses at Loyola University in 1967 and 1976 and at LSU from 1974 to 1975; the subject matter of Percy’s classes included existential themes in literature and fiction writing (Tolson 342-343, 391-397, 407). Joking about teaching, Percy once wrote,

For me, teaching is harder work than writing. It is hard enough to deal with words but having to deal with words and students overtaken as they are by their terrible needs, vulnerability, likeability, intelligence, and dumbness wears me out. How I respect and envy the gifted teacher! (Percy, “Why I Live Where I Live” 4)

Altogether, Percy’s time as a novelist, advocate for justice, consultant, and teacher give the impression of Percy as a complex man dedicated to improving the spiritual and material welfare of those around him.

Certain key figures and philosophical trends shaped the direction of Percy’s work. Dostoyevsky’s ability to critique larger societal movements inspired Percy (Samway, *Walker*

*Percy: A Life* 127; Tolson 183; Wilson, *Walker Percy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the Search for Influence*). Like Dostoyevsky, Sartre and Camus also influenced Percy, in large part because of their ability to package philosophical themes into novel form (Holditch 17). Percy began novel writing and philosophizing as an outsider. Percy felt free to read widely, searching for truth across traditions. Percy engaged with both American and Continental philosophical traditions alike. The Thomist James Collins's book *The Existentialists: A Critical Study* introduced Percy to the existentialists, including Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Sartre, Jaspers, Marcel, and Heidegger (Collins; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 10).<sup>1</sup> Percy read Julius Friend's and James Feibleman's books on Peirce, including Feibleman's (1946) *An Introduction to Peirce's Philosophy, Interpreted as a System* (Samway, Introduction to *A Thief of Peirce* x-xi). Samway writes, "The exposure of Friend and Feibleman most likely helped Percy, particularly as a beginning novelist, to compare further the thought of American philosophers with that of their European counterparts" (Samway, Introduction to *Thief* xi). Despite their disparate origins, perhaps Percy saw in both Continental existentialism and American pragmatism a thirst for the concrete and the real. As Collins writes in his preface to *The Existentialists*, "For their part, contemporary Thomists—notably, Gilson and Maritain—have spoken of their doctrine as the authentic existentialism, or, at least, as the only philosophy of being in which existence receives its rightful place" (Collins, Preface to *The Existentialists* xiv). Percy would draw upon Maritain and other Thomists, including Frederick Wilhelmsen, in formulating his philosophy of

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<sup>1</sup> Despite his interest in Heidegger, Percy's Thomistic understanding of analogy set him apart from Heidegger. Lawler writes, "There is no existentialist decisionism and no historicization of Being in Percy's appreciation of Heidegger. The Thomist attempts to give a realistic account of the individual human experiences Heidegger often describes so well" (Lawler 84). Like Jaspers, Heidegger failed to appreciate the analogical relationship of Being to beings (Collins 112, 115-117; see Hart 251 for a discussion of Heidegger's failure to realize the importance of analogy). Percy's appreciation for analogy allows him to conceive of the analogical relationship between Being and beings. Being qua Being is neither the totally transcendent One nor the immanent, diverse Many. By implication, Percy appreciated the importance of history without reducing Being to history. Perhaps most importantly, Percy appreciated the revelatory aspect of Heidegger's thinking without relativizing revelation.

communication. Responding to the larger philosophical currents of his day, Percy sought the middle path between idealism and materialism: realism (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 235). Materialism failed to account for mind, soul, and self, while idealism failed to grasp the recalcitrant materiality of the world. These larger philosophical trends ended in catastrophe because of their implications for the human person in the concrete, a creature desiring transcendence, community, and contact with being.

Until the end of his life, Percy continued to respond to problematic exigences in the historical moment. In 1983, Percy penned *Lost in the Cosmos*, a mock self-help book that satirized the therapeutic quest for self-discovery. According to Percy, the development of the autonomous self has wreaked havoc upon the world ever since the time of Descartes (Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos* 44). The autonomous self, not knowing from whence it came nor where it goes, wanders about the world seeking transcendence through science, art, sex, drugs, war, etc. Percy called into question the myth of Progress and wondered why, if everything keeps getting better and better, the twentieth century has had so many deaths from war and genocide (arguably more deaths than all other centuries combined) (Percy, *Lost* 190-191). A pervasive atmosphere of passive consumerism, induced in large part by the mass media, has left the autonomous self in awe of what Heidegger called the “they,” or those who know (Percy, *Lost* 75, 119; Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* 54, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164). The autonomous self can surrender “sovereignty” to the attitudes of the “they” in both science and art (Percy, *Lost* 122; Percy, *The Message* 185). “They,” whether modern scientists or postmodern literary theorists, say who or what the self is, mere brain or mere language. For Percy, certain postmodern trends overemphasized the social construction of the self, which tends to disappear in a sea of competing discourses of equal authority (Tolson 279-280). The self may not be completely

autonomous, but the self is not completely determined by language, either. Tolson writes, “Percy could not understand their [certain academics’] attraction to such French theorists as Derrida. He saw the deconstructive enterprise as little more than rehashed Nietzscheanism, an attempt to get rid of God by first disposing of grammar” (Tolson 460). Despite his critique of scientism, Percy never abandoned the importance of knowledge in favor of irrationalism. Percy critiqued both rationalist and irrationalist trends in philosophy, especially in semiotics. Percy held a lifelong interest in the Thomist John Poinsett, whom Percy likely first learned about from Maritain (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 51; Percy as qtd. in Samway, *A Thief of Peirce* 179; Maritain, *Ransoming the Time* 217-254; Tolson 471). Sometime around 1987, the semiotician John Deely asked Percy to review his translation of Poinsett’s *Tractatus de Signis*, a Thomist account of semiotics (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 179). Citing lack of expertise while turning down Deely’s request, Percy nevertheless expressed hope in Poinsett’s realist semiotics to heal the divide between “neurone scientists and the literary structuralist-post-structuralists [sic]” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 179). Just one year before his death, Percy confided to his friend and Peirce scholar Kenneth Laine Ketner that he planned to use Peirce’s semiotics to support a work on Catholic apologetics (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 130-131). No one has discovered Percy’s last, lost work of apologetics, which he had titled *Contra Gentiles* after Aquinas’ work by the same name (McDonnell). Percy never lost sight of the importance of philosophical realism to his Catholic faith. Like Flannery O’Connor, Percy believed that the Eucharist had to be the Real Presence of Christ (Desmond 220; Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 25-26; Walter 235). Christianity offered more than a functional, therapeutic “myth” providing individuals with the necessary means for coping with existence (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 27-28): “And if Christ be not risen again, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain” (1 Co. 15:14 DRA).

Realism—which acknowledges the reality of other selves, the priority and importance of being, and perhaps above all the abiding relationship between words and things—places necessary limits on the self that ever seeks to escape its predicament (Crawford 167; Tolson 455). The predicament of the self is its own unspeakableness. The symbol can render everything in the world formulable with the exception of the self, which I describe further in the third chapter of this dissertation (Percy, *The Message* 283-286; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 75).

Percy kept his faith until the end, dying from prostate cancer in 1990 at age 73. Percy was buried in the cemetery of St. Joseph's Abbey, where he belonged to the Benedictines' lay confraternity (Tolson 488). Percy left behind two daughters, Mary Pratt and Ann, and his wife Bunt. The malign spirit of self-annihilation that overcame his grandfather and father would never reach Percy. As Percy once told a student, his whole life had been an attempt to understand his father's suicide (Tolson 396). Indeed, Percy spent his life writing for an audience of solitary pilgrims in a secular age (Tolson 489). Percy lived a life marked by tragedy and comedy, despair and hope, immanence and transcendence. While writing his novel *Lancelot* in the 1970s, Percy nearly lost his faith (Tolson 382-383, 413). Psychology did not save Percy during this crisis (Tolson 483). Science and art did not, either. Only grace pulled him through. Near the end of his life, Percy confided to his daughter Ann that only the Church had saved him (Tolson 483). Percy also told Ann, "I think sometimes that God gave me such a wonderful family later in life to make up for the sadness that went on in my family when I was young" (Percy as qtd. in Tolson 483). As his cancer progressed, Percy confessed his readiness to die to his friend Shelby Foote: "Dying, if that's what it comes to, is no big thing, since I'm ready for it, am prepared for it by the Catholic faith which I believe" (Percy as qtd. in Tolson 481). Percy lived his life "transparently before God," just like those religious minds that he admired: Simone Weil, Martin Buber,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Flannery O'Connor (Percy, *Lost* 157; Wilson, *Reading Walker Percy's Novels* 132). Percy has largely been remembered as a novelist writing about existential and religious themes. However, as evidenced by the recent publications of Percy's *Symbol & Existence* and Marsh's *Walker Percy, Philosopher*, scholars continue to explore and appreciate Percy's philosophical meditations on the nature of communication (Marsh).

### *Key Coordinates in Percy's Philosophy of Communication*

Percy formulated his philosophy of communication using a variety of different sources, including anthropology, existentialism, Thomism, and semiotics.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in this section I will go into greater depth about the theoretical grounding of Percy's works. I will focus primarily on Percy's philosophy of communication as articulated in his nonfiction works. Where appropriate throughout this dissertation, I will use Percy's novels to illustrate his philosophical ideas. Many have focused on Percy as a novelist; in this dissertation, however, I foreground the coordinates that appear in Percy's nonfiction works, which deal explicitly with the nature of symbolic mediation. Percy published one work of collected essays in his lifetime, *The Message in the Bottle*, in 1975. Eight years later, Percy published *Lost in the Cosmos*, which contains a compact

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<sup>2</sup> Percy's understanding of "semiotics" differs from many modern and postmodern conceptions of "semiotics." Unlike those working in zoo-semiotics, Percy did not take an interest in animal communication (Percy, *Lost* 85n). Neither did Percy care for the mere analysis of syntax or semantics (Percy, *The Message* 167-168; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 158). As I explore in the following section, Percy disagreed with certain behaviorist, structuralist, and poststructuralist varieties of semiotics that neglected to give an account of human consciousness. At the most basic level, Percy thought of semiotics as a type of anthropology. You cannot merely study signs and symbols. You must study the human being using signs and symbols (Percy, *Lost* 85n-87n; Percy, *The Message* 11). Percy stressed how language use (and abuse) can lead to existential insight into human experiences, such as joy and despair, which the "semiotic primer of the self" in *Lost in the Cosmos* seeks to explore (Percy, *Lost* 86-126). On a related note, the editors of *Symbol & Existence* speculate that Percy preferred to use the term "semiotic" when referring to his own work instead of "semiotics." The term "semiotic," the editors allege, distanced Percy's work from the "semiotics" of Morris and others (Ketner et al., preface to *Symbol & Existence* xiii, note 12). Nonetheless, in my estimation, Percy has used both "semiotics" and "semiotic" favorably in his writings, depending on the context (e.g., Percy, *Lost* 82, 85; Percy, *The Message* 243-264). For this dissertation, I will use "semiotics" and "semiotic" interchangeably, bearing in mind key differences discussed below that separate Percy's understanding of "semiotics" from certain behaviorist, structuralist, and poststructuralist accounts (Percy, *Lost* 85n-87n).

account of his philosophy of communication. Fr. Samway put together another collection of Percy's nonfiction essays in 1991, just one year after Percy's death. Finally, a group of dedicated scholars released Percy's hitherto unpublished manuscript *Symbol & Existence* in September 2019. These four books constitute the core of Percy's philosophical works on the nature of communication. If philosophy deals in the art of marking distinctions, then Percy was a first-rate philosopher (Sokolowski). Several key distinctions appear in his work: sign/symbol, dyadic/triadic, environment/world, and immanence/transcendence. Indeed, Percy often dealt with two terms in dialectical tension. Unlike the work of a Hegelian, however, Percy's dialectical pairings do not resolve into some higher synthesis. All idealistic, dialectical syntheses fail to encapsulate the individual human being in its unique particularity. Rather, Percy uses each dialectical pair to probe the empirical nature of the concrete, existential self.

### Sign/Symbol

After failing to publish the two apprentice novels previously mentioned, Percy began writing essays on the nature of language and communication in the 1950s. In 1954, Percy published a review of Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*, which extended upon Langer's earlier work *Philosophy in a New Key*, a book that stressed the unique human capacity for symbolization. Percy appreciated Langer's distinction between the "sign" and the "symbol" (Percy, "Symbol as Need" 385-386). Signs involve a pair of stimulus and response, or cause and effect. Animals use signs to communicate with one another. The classic example of Pavlov's dog demonstrates sign behavior; the causal stimulus of a bell elicits the response of salivation. Symbols, on the other hand, transcend the mechanism of stimulus and response. A sign "announces" something, whereas a symbol "re-presents" something (Percy, "Symbol as Need"



385, 389). Symbols enable real “conception of an object” and real knowledge inexplicable in functional terms (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 385-386, 388). Humans use symbols to communicate with one another. Explanations of communication in terms of the sign alone fail to capture the true nature of the communicative event. Ultimately, Langer’s distinction between sign and symbol allowed Percy to critique positivists, behaviorists, and General Semanticists alike (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 385-386). Despite drawing upon Cassirer’s idealism in formulating her thoughts on the symbol, Langer still retained her naturalist presuppositions and explained the symbol in terms of a biological “need” (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 388-389). Percy rejected the reduction of human symbol-making to functional interpretations. Percy writes,

Simply to call the symbolic transformation a need and let it go at that, is to set up an autonomous faculty which serves its own ends, the equivalent of saying that bees store honey because there is in bees a need of storing honey. (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 389).

Symbols do not “constitute” knowledge in the idealist sense but rather mediate knowledge of reality (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 387-389). Symbols are not ends in themselves but rather means to knowledge of reality (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 389-390). In his review of Langer’s work, Percy reflects on the parallels between Langer’s philosophy and Thomistic realism (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 382). Without discounting the originality and importance of Langer’s contribution, Percy claims that both Langer and certain Scholastics refused to discount the intellectual significance of the symbol (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 382-384). As I hope to make clear throughout this dissertation, the symbol makes knowledge possible and existence formulable. One recognizes something true about what another has symbolized, something that

resonates with ontological and epistemological significance. Symbols reveal what something *is* and “affirm” that something *is* (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 55-60, 212-213s).<sup>3</sup>

In this early essay, the reader can appreciate larger implications that play themselves out in the rest of Percy’s body of work. First, Percy’s view of art, including novels, follows from his reading of Langer. As a symbol, the work of art is not an end in itself, despite Modernism’s protests to the contrary. Unlike his friend Shelby Foote, Percy always believed that art serves as a means to some end beyond itself (Tolson 491, 493). In Percy’s case, his novels portray characters in predicaments awaiting “news,” a certain type of knowledge relative to their alienated condition (see Percy, *The Message* 111). Second, following Langer, Percy admits that symbols may be either discursive or non-discursive—an important qualification that allows Percy’s philosophy to cover a wider range of communicative phenomena beyond the mere “discursive symbol, word and proposition” (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 381). A novel *is* a symbol, but so is a gesture. Third, Percy found Langer’s distinction between sign and symbol compatible with C. S. Peirce’s ontological categories of “secondness” and “thirdness.” Reference to Peirce does not appear in Percy’s review of Langer’s *Philosophy in a New Key* (although Langer does reference Peirce in her *Philosophy in a New Key*) (Langer 54, 77, 274). Percy would later

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<sup>3</sup> Percy distinguished between “sign” and “symbol” in *Symbol & Existence*, but in *Lost in the Cosmos* he used the word “signal” in place of “sign” and “sign” in place of “symbol”; in the preface to the 1951 edition of *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer expressed her wish to have used “signal” in place of “sign” and “sign” in place of “symbol” (Langer *Philosophy in a New Key* x; Percy *Lost* 87n). Among other things, Percy feared that audiences would think of a “symbol” as something novel or rare rather than something permeating consciousness (Percy, *Lost* 87n; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 74-75). Nonetheless, for the sake of this dissertation, I preserve Percy and Langer’s original terminology of “sign” and “symbol” because Percy more consistently uses the language of “sign” and “symbol” across the majority of his works. Further, the word “symbol” retains the etymological significance of *symbollein*, a Greek term that means “putting together” or “thrown together” and implies “coupling,” a key term for Percy (Percy, as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 172; “Symbol”). The action of “coupling” implies a “coupler,” a soul. In my estimation, the use of the word “sign” may shift undue attention away from the triadic nature of communication toward the study of signs alone. Percy proposed an anthropology and sought to study the human person, names, and things named in relation, which my continued usage of “symbol” seeks to preserve.

associate Langer's "sign" with Peirce's "dyadic" event and Langer's "symbol" with Peirce's "triadic" event.

### Dyadic/Triadic

Modern scientists study reality as an interaction of dyadic, mechanistic forces, whereas Percy, following Peirce, sought to understand human beings as acting on a different ontological plane: the triadic. After reading Langer's account of the symbolic breakthrough (in Helen Keller), Percy discovered that Peirce had been onto the same thing as Langer with his category of the "triad," or "thirdness" (Percy, *The Message* 38-39). Examples of dyadic phenomena include "particles hitting particles, chemical reactions, energy exchanges, gravity attractions between masses, field forces, and so on" (Percy, *Lost* 85-86). Scientists working from naïve dyadic presuppositions understand the mind solely in terms of the brain: the brain *causes* certain mental states. Or, for idealists formulating their epistemology, an object imposes itself upon a subject and *causes* knowledge. Both materialists and idealists alike can fall prey to explaining human behavior in dyadic terms. The "neurone scientists and the literary structuralist-post-structuralists [sic]" alike understand the "self" as a product of dyadic forces, whether those forces occur in the brain or in language (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 179). Both Freud and Marx understood the human subject in dyadic terms, too. Freud understood the ego as a result of dyadic, unconscious interactions, while Marx understood the subject in terms of a dyadic dialectic, where a material ground caused certain ideas to take hold in the subject and society at large (Percy, *Signposts* 128, 284; B. Smith, *Walker Percy and the Politics of the Wayfarer* 42). Shannon and Weaver's information transfer model of communication also relies upon a dyadic framework of sender and receiver. As Freire might suggest, the sender causes the receiver to

receive a message, just as a teacher might “deposit” knowledge in a student’s mind in a “banking model” of education (Freire). A preference for dyadic explanations reflects modernity’s preoccupation with efficient causality and the *vis a tergo*, or the force from behind (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 230, 261). Yet, dyadic accounts omit the most important datum of all: the human being. Describing the totality of phenomena in the universe in dyadic terms fails because theorists must account for their own behavior in dyadic terms. Thus, if he were consistent, Pavlov would have to explain his own theorizing in terms of stimulus and response.

Percy believed that language use set the human being at a “distance” from the surrounding environment of dyadic, mechanistic forces (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 48-49). Thus, linguistic, triadic events involve three constituent elements: a namer, a name, and a thing named. All communication, failed or successful, involves these three elements (Percy, *The Message* 40).<sup>4</sup> Percy labeled the triadic event the “delta phenomenon” because when diagrammed the three constituent elements take the shape of a triangle (a Greek “delta,” or Δ) signifying “irreducibility” (Percy, *The Message* Ch. 1, 40, 42). You cannot reduce the triadic relationship to a sequence of dyadic causes, despite Ogden and Richards’ attempt to do so (Percy, *The Message* 40, 42). Efficient causes do not link the word, referent, and interpreter together (Percy, *The Message* 36-37). Rather, an intentional relation of identity couples words and things; a real, immaterial bond holds between language in all its “sensuous” forms and those material things that language mediates (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 162, 185). As Percy might

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<sup>4</sup> More precisely, symbols involve three constituent elements at the “atomic level”; at the “molecular level,” successful symbolization, which results in communication, includes a fourth element: another human being (Percy, *The Message* 167n; see also Percy *The Message* 200, 270; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 62-63, 159). Ultimately, the “tetrad” (including the fourth element of the other human being) can be reduced into two triadic relations: (1) speaker, name, thing named and (2) hearer, name, thing named (Percy, *The Message* 167n). On this point, Percy’s comments on the role of the other in the act of the symbolization might be extended and textured by Bakhtin’s analysis of the “utterance” as the basic unit of speech, which always implies the other (Bakhtin).

suggest, the word “water” *is* the water “*in alio esse*,” in a different mode of existence (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 185). The perceptual word “water” carries the conceptual *waterness* within it (Percy, *Lost* 102n; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 227). The word and thing interpenetrate, the former transforming into the latter in a real way (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 172). That which “couples” the word and thing is also immaterial yet real (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 72). Thus, a triadic account of human communication makes room for the human will. All too often, naturalistic explanations of human behavior neglect the role of individual volition in shaping interpretation and utterances. When explaining why someone acted the way that he did, individuals may quickly jump to the false dichotomy of nature or nurture. People look for dyadic explanations in genes or social environment. But the triadic nature of communication presupposes a subject capable of selecting and interpreting meaning from his world as well as entering into intersubjective union with others. Triadicity, or “thirdness,” presupposes a world of meaning shared in common.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Scholars have made various attempts to classify (and thereby “dispose of”) Percy (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107-109). Despite his interest in and ability to draw upon existentialism, Percy eschewed the label of existentialist (Percy, *Signposts* 375). For Percy, alienation did not result from the Enlightenment or life in a mass culture; rather, alienation is primordial because of the Fall (Percy, *The Message* 24). Many have labeled Percy a novelist; however, Percy thought that people would remember him for his work in the philosophy of communication (Gulledge 285; see Lawler 97). Others have labeled Percy as a pragmatist. In the preface to Percy’s *Symbol & Existence*, the editors write, “And it is to the pragmatists that Percy turns to support his philosophical hypothesis, his ‘radical anthropology’” (Ketner et al., preface to *Symbol & Existence* xii). One cannot blame Ketner, a pragmatist and Peirce scholar, in the least for trying to claim Percy’s work as a vindication of the verities of pragmatism. But Percy references Peirce on only two pages in *Symbol & Existence*. As Percy himself noted in a letter to Ketner written in 1989, one year before his death,

As you well know, I am not a student of Peirce. I am a thief of Peirce. I take from him what I want and let the rest go, most of it. I am only interested in CSP [C. S. Peirce] insofar as I understand his attack on nominalism and his rehabilitation of Scholastic realism. (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 130)

Percy continues, “I admire at most one percent of it [Peirce’s writing] (two pages) and with the understanding to [sic] that it would spin CSP in his grave” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 131). Percy claimed that he was interested in Peirce only insofar as Peirce’s philosophy could support Percy’s “Catholic apologetic” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 131). In one of his letters to Ketner, Percy writes, “Sometimes I could genuflect before CSP for his genius and for seeing, before his time and *before our time still*, the difference between dyadicity and triadicity” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 4). Percy continues, “Othertimes I could kick his [Peirce’s] ass for his deliberate withdrawal into logical games” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 4). Ultimately, Percy thought that Peirce was a “very bad” writer (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 26). Despite some references to Peirce’s theory of “abduction,” for the most part Percy only used Peirce’s ontological categories of secondness (dyadic) and thirdness (triadic), eschewing notions of

## Environment/World

Percy's distinction between dyadic and triadic leads to another important distinction between environment and world, *Umwelt* and *Welt*. Binswanger, Von Uexküll, Eccles, and Heidegger influenced Percy's distinction between environment and world (Percy, *Lost* 86n; Percy *The Message* 203n). Animals, dealing in signs, inhabit an environment. Biologists may speak in terms of animals fulfilling various biological "needs" in their environments.

Psychologists or sociologists may also insist that humans have various "needs" (e.g., for sex, for sociability, for community, and so on). But, as suggested above, Percy rejected the functional notion of the symbol that emphasizes the symbol as satisfying some biological, psychological, or sociological need (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 25-29). To underscore the difference between animals and humans, Percy argued that human beings can have all their various biological, psychological, and sociological needs met and still suffer from alienation. The successful Westerner (e.g., a businessman) inhabiting the best of all possible environments may live a life of despair in the suburbs while St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta experiences joy in the slums of India (Percy, *Lost* 80-82, 122). But why? Because the environment does not matter so much as the world. The "triadic" breakthrough into a shared world of meaning presupposes its own unique successes and failures beyond explanation in dyadic terms (Percy, *The Message* 41).

Upon discovering that one thing has a name, a child will begin to ask the name of everything else in their surrounding milieu (Percy, *Signposts* 126). In like manner, after finding that the word

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firstness as unhelpful (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 130). If anything, more so than a pragmatist or an existentialist, Percy was a Thomist (Lawler Ch. 3). Percy repeatedly cites and relies upon Thomists such as James Collins, Jacques Maritain, Frederick Wilhelmsen, John of St. Thomas, and St. Thomas Aquinas. Nonetheless, Tolson suggests that Percy shied away from using the language of Scholastic realism because such language would not have resonated with his contemporaries (Tolson 241). Below I will try to resist the temptation to label Percy as one thing or another, even as a Thomist. Percy, like Augustine, sought the truth wherever he found it, even if it meant reading atheist existentialists like Sartre.

“water” meant the *water* running over her hand, Helen Keller insisted upon knowing the name of everything else (Percy, *Signposts* 126). The joy of a child, a deaf-mute, a poet, or a scientist discovering the name of something is an ontological and epistemological joy, a revelatory insight into the *thatness* and *whatness* of being itself (R. Palmer 240; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 55-60).

Thirdness presupposes a world where everything has a name. Even the unknown, the ineffable, and the gaps have names: “unknown,” “ineffable,” and “gaps” (Percy, *Lost* 99-100). Humans experience the world as a “totality” of meaning, as “all-or-nothing” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 101). Ask someone to provide something that does not have a name, and inevitably he will fail. Amending certain phenomenologists’ understanding of intentionality, Percy states that consciousness is not merely “of” something but “of” something “as” something (Percy, *The Message* 272-273; Heidegger, *Being and Time* 56, 202; R. Palmer 128). Humans know the world around them under the auspices of the symbol (Percy, *Lost* 100, 211n-212n). I do not know *only* the symbol, as idealists suggest, but I know *through* the symbol (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 184-185). I hear the chirping sound outside my window “as” birds. I taste tea “as” bitter and sugar “as” sweet (Weaver 1360). The symbol makes both genuine knowledge and error possible (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 75, 96). When presented with something truly novel, anxiety ensues (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 195). Human beings will conceive that novelty “as” something, regardless. I run my hand under a classroom desk and feel something “as” gum, which later turns out to be only a knobby part of the desk. Percy describes the symbolic function’s tendency to “*make use of whatever adventitial elements are at hand*” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107-109). Lacking the right symbol, another symbol will fill the void. Everything in the world is capable of being construed by the symbol with the exception of one thing: the self (Percy, *Lost* 211n-212n; Percy *Message* 283-284, Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 195, Percy, *Signposts* 126). The self has no

adequate symbol because all symbols apply equally to the self. Like everything else, the self must conceive of itself “as” something. A New Age pantheist might say, “I am everything.” A Sartrean Buddhist might say, “I am nothing.” Both “everything” and “nothing” apply and serve to place the self for a time. Failing to identify yourself “as” something means that others will identify you “as” something, anyway. As a triadic creature, the self must constantly struggle to place itself in the world and must repeatedly answer the questions, “What am I? Who am I?”

Animals in environments suffer from no such solicitousness. Joy comes from naming the unnameable and hearing it heard (Percy, *Lost* 120-121; *Percy The Message* 97). We hear the unnameable heard anytime someone, especially an artist, articulates for us through the mediation of the symbol what had hitherto been unformulated (Percy, *Lost* 119, 121). Despair follows upon the lie, the identification of the self “as” something which it is not (i.e., “bad faith”) (Percy, *Signposts* 390). The self can act in “bad faith” and succumb to all sorts of impersonations regarding its identity (Percy, *Lost* 210; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). As Percy notes, “The self in a world is rich or poor accordingly as it succeeds in identifying its otherwise unspeakable self...” *as totem, as God, as creature under God, as transcendent, as immanent* (Percy, *Lost* 122).

### Immanence/Transcendence

Percy uses the terms “immanent” and “transcendent” as ways that the self may experience and understand itself. Quite simply, immanence may be described as “this-worldly,” while transcendence may be described as “other-worldly” (cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age* 13-16). The immanent is natural and ordinary, whereas the transcendent is supernatural and extraordinary. Immanence describes the material environment characterized by becoming, time, and change.



When conceived of as a purely immanent creature, the self is nothing more than a physical brain responding to dyadic signs. The purely immanent self assumes the disposition of a consumer in an environment with various material needs. Transcendence, on the other hand, refers to the immateriality of existence characterized by being, atemporality, and permanence. Historically, religion afforded the means for transcendence. In a secular age, however, Percy argues, science and art provide the primary avenues for transcendence. The transcendent scientist stands over against the world as a knower. Thus, scientists can explain the behavior of others in immanent terms while not having to account for their own transcendent scientific activity. The artist, too, can experience transcendence in the creation of a work of art. Breakthrough into the realm of transcendence implies a world opened by the copula “is.” Both the scientist and the artist name the world and discover being, opening up revelatory insight for themselves and others (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 197).

However, Percy observes that two difficulties emerge from transcendence in a postreligious age. First, the immanent consumer self hands over “sovereignty” to the transcendent knowers, the “they.” “They” write novels, and “they” do experiments (Percy, *Lost* 119-124; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 129-130). Surrender of sovereignty leads to scientism and a cult of the artist as well as a strict dichotomy between the lay “consumer” and the priestly “theorist” (Percy, *Signposts* 297). The immanent consumer self experiences transcendence vicariously through the scientist or poet. The angelic, “objective” “theorist” prescribes remedies for the beastly consumer’s various immanent “needs” (Percy, *The Message* 113). Second, transcendence can lead to “re-entry” problems, or the malaise of the ordinary that comes after experiencing the extraordinary (Percy, *Lost* 114-124). The abstracted self must find some way to reinsert itself back into everyday life. Transcendence is nothing short of a mystical experience.

Deprived of God, individuals seek transcendence in sex, drugs, violence, and war. Individuals will stop at nothing to escape from their predicament, the anxiety inducing inability to place the “self” in a world of meaning, the predicament of not knowing who they are or what they are supposed to be doing. The pleasure of transcendence comes not from finding the self but from losing the self, a type of ecstasy or *ek-stasis*, a standing outside of one’s self (“Ecstatic”; cf. Percy, *Lost* 124). In Kierkegaardian terms, rotation looks for transcendence in the future (e.g., a release from everydayness into novelty), while repetition looks for transcendence in the past (e.g., returning home, nostalgia, etc.) (Lawson 890). Percy likely read about immanence and transcendence in Collins’ (1952) *The Existentialists*. For Collins, only the Christian faith could “reconcile the immanent tendency to remain loyal to our earthly condition and the equally importunate drive toward transcendence” (Collins 16). Some may emphasize transcendence at the expense of immanence, placing God and the supernatural beyond experience and the reach of humanity; God in this sense becomes the utterly transcendent and unknowable Other. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, stresses the importance of both immanence and transcendence, the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, the sacramental and “anagogic,” the “holiness of the ordinary” (Percy, *Signposts* 368-370; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 234). The human predicament involves both immanence and transcendence, primordial alienation (i.e., the Fall) and periodic transcendence. The key is to privilege neither immanence nor transcendence but to recognize the importance of both.

Just as the symbol can reveal a shared world of transcendent knowledge and infuse experience with ontological joy, the symbol can also lead to ignorance and boredom (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96, 100-101). To read and discuss only the wonders of symbol use neglects the shadow side of communication in Percy’s work. Like Adam in Eden, the toddler naming his

world encounters existence as something extraordinary. Though not a Saussurean semiotician, Percy used the language of Saussure in *Lost in the Cosmos* to describe how the signified transforms the signifier.<sup>6</sup> For example, at first the vocable “balloon” takes on characteristics of *balloonness*, of “the distention, the stretched-rubber, light, up-tending, squinch-sound-against-fingers signified” (Percy, *Lost* 104). As mentioned above, words and things come to interpenetrate through repeated symbol use (Percy, *Lost* 102; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 227). The perceptual word “apple” comes to carry around within it the conceptual quality of *appleness* (Percy, *Lost* 102n). Over time, however, the world becomes ordinary, mundane, taken for granted, familiar. As Percy notes, “there is a hardening and closure of the signifier, so that in the end the signified becomes encased in a simulacrum like a mummy in a mummy case” (Percy, *Lost* 104). Words no longer intend existence but only themselves. The symbolic-complex “disposes of” the truly novel as an instance of something already encountered (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107-109). Consider Percy’s example of a bird watcher identifying a bird as merely a “sparrow.” One bird watcher says to another, “What is that?” The other replies, “That is only a sparrow.” The bird in its concrete particularity has disappeared into the “sarcophagus” of the symbol “sparrow” (Percy, *Lost* 104). As Whitehead suggested with his “fallacy of misplaced

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<sup>6</sup> The most significant difference between Percy and Saussure is that Saussure presupposes a dyadic approach to the study of communication, whereas Percy presupposes a triadic approach to the study of communication. Saussure’s analysis of the “speaking-circuit,” which follows the sequence of “concepts” (signifieds) and “sound-images” (signifiers) between two speakers, strikes the reader as exemplary of his dyadic approach (Saussure 11-12, 67). Singer explains that Saussure’s “semiology” studies “the sign-function as a dyadic relation of signifier and signified that dispenses with both independent objects and subjects” (Singer 491). Saussure’s dyadic approach places him, the semiotician, in a transcendent relation to others (cf. Percy, *Lost* 118). Percy, on the other hand, goes to great lengths to critique the transcendent posture assumed by scientists and semioticians alike. Several figures reject Saussure’s dyadic approach. Ketner identifies both Saussure and Charles Morris as “arch-dyadic-scientists” (Ketner as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 274). Berthoff also implicates Saussure’s semiotics as dyadic (Berthoff “I.A. Richards and the Philosophy of Rhetoric” 199-200). Thus, due to his dyadic approach, Saussure fails to grasp the importance of mediation, another name for thirdness or “triadicity” (Berthoff, “I.A. Richards and the Philosophy of Rhetoric” 199; Peirce, “A Guess at the Riddle” 248, 255).

concreteness,” the abstraction becomes more real than the thing itself (Percy, *The Message* 58). That is *only* an apple. That is *only* a balloon. That is *only* me. That is *only* you.

In Percy’s essay “The Loss of the Creature,” he describes how tourists and students alike may assume the attitude of passive consumers, encountering only a reified symbolic apparatus instead of existence in its inexhaustible plenitude (Percy, *The Message* Ch. 2). Whether intentional or not, “experts” present symbols to tourists and students who may passively consume them (Percy, *The Message* 55). As Percy suggests, once the symbol-complex has formulated everything in advance, only with difficulty can a human being encounter something as it is (Percy, *Symbol & Existence*, 100, 113). In addition to catastrophe and “apprenticeship to a great man,” the use of poetic language can revivify the taken for granted (Percy, *Lost* 104; Percy, *The Message* 60). The Russian literary theorist Victor Shklovsky provided Percy with a glimpse into the relationship between familiarization and language. Art can “defamiliarize” and make strange all that has become familiar and taken for granted. As Shklovsky writes, “Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12). Shklovsky suggests, “... [A]rt exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12). Both Shklovsky and Percy would agree that perception and language are thoroughly interconnected, and that by deliberately tampering with language, one may indeed refresh perception of reality. In Shklovsky, the whole point of art is to remove “the automatism of perception” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 13). For his own part, Percy was thoroughly invested in using catastrophe and apocalypse in his novels and philosophical essays to render the familiar unfamiliar, whether sparrows or Wednesday afternoons (Percy, *Lost* 105; Percy, “The Man on the Train” 92). As Percy writes, “A poet can wrench signifier out of context

and exhibit it in all its queerness and splendor” (Percy, *Lost* 105). Percy states, “What I see when the poet salvages the word from its utility context and holds it up for my gaze is the thing in the word in another mode of existence, *in alio esse*” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 227). By implication, everyone, whether self-identifying as a poet or not, has the responsibility to actively recover being and the “holiness of the ordinary” from the encasement of the symbol (Collins 205; Percy, *Signposts* 368-370).

Percy’s ideas on the shadow side of communication have wide-ranging implications for religion and education. Even religious symbols may become familiarized and taken for granted. Percy writes, “It is a paradox that insofar as the religious symbol is allowed to slip away into the zone of the ‘religious’—a dissociated realm of activity where only ‘religious’ things happen—it loses its meaning for us” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). Percy used an indirect approach for conveying religious truths because he knew that, all too often, religious symbols may obscure the divine reality beyond them. The Christian apologist lives in a historical moment where the words themselves have been “emptied out” (Percy, *Lost* 21; Percy, *The Message* 116). A passive, consumptive attitude toward religious symbols threatens the faith just as much as a hostile attitude (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 108). Percy explains that “old words of grace are worn smooth as poker chips and a certain devaluation has occurred, like a poker chip after it is cashed in” (Percy, *The Message* 116). The student, too, runs the risk of encountering only the media of education rather than the reality that those symbols intend. Lacking a first-hand referent, the symbol will make use of nearby “*adventitial elements*” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 106-109). The symbol “George Washington,” for example, may carry within it the mundane qualities of the elementary school classroom rather than the historical personage of George Washington—“the odor of book, two-dimensional pictures, etc.” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107). Percy writes, “It

is the irony of the passively received education that what will be apprehended is not the thing which is taught but the paraphernalia of teaching. The vehicle transmits not its passenger but only itself” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107). A great book on the life of George Washington, however, could transform the symbol “George Washington” once again, restoring the “existential object in all its inexhaustibility” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). Thus, Percy thought that students truly desiring to learn had to take an active role in their education. The apocalyptic ruins make for a better place to discover Shakespeare than the classroom (Percy, *The Message* 5, 56-57). The educator must struggle against the consumptive attitude in the classroom and defamiliarize symbols devalued by years of passively received education. For the realist teacher or student, the mystery of being is inexhaustible (Percy, *Lost* 105).

### Percy’s Hermeneutic of the Self

In sum, Percy’s hermeneutic of the self requires an understanding of the distinctions between sign/symbol, dyadic/triadic, environment/world, and immanence/transcendence. Percy suggested that the proper object of study for semiotics is “not texts and other coded sign utterances but the self which produces texts or hears sign utterances” (Percy, *Lost* 83). Like Martin Buber in *Between Man and Man*, Percy offered an anthropology rooted in communication (Buber 199, 243). Man is the symbol-using and “asserting” animal (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 30-33). Signs occur on a purely immanent plane of dyadic, stimulus-response interactions. Animals respond to signs in their environment. Humans, on the other hand, use symbols to mediate their knowledge of reality. Symbols consist of both material and immaterial components, matter and form (Joseph 15-16; Percy, *The Message* 156; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 34, 96, 187-188). As a means of knowledge, symbols transport the symbol user beyond

the material sphere of immanence. Humans achieve transcendence through their use of symbols. Triadic events involve three components: an interpreter, a symbol, and a referent. An intentional, real relation of identity holds between the symbol and its referent. The interpreter (a soul, a mind, a self) couples the symbol and referent together (Percy, *The Message* 43-44, 251; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 72). Symbols tell us both *that* and *what* something “is,” not necessarily what something “does” (Percy, *The Message* 71-72). Triadic events cannot be reduced to causal, dyadic events. The symbol opens the human being to a world of meaning beyond an environment of various biological needs. Humans share a triadic world with others; thus, a shared world implies an immaterial nexus of meaning between subjects. Consciousness emerges because of the symbol. Etymologically speaking, the word “consciousness” comes from the Latin *con* + *scire*, or “to know with” (Percy, *The Message* 274). The symbol affords intersubjectivity, the immaterial bond of Namer and Hearer (Percy, *The Message* 265-276; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 188). Scientists can understand everything in the universe in dyadic terms except for the self (Percy, *Lost* 211n-212n). Importantly, scientists cannot account for their own activity in dyadic terms. As a triadic creature, the self searches for symbols to understand its predicament. However, the autonomous self searches in vain for the ultimate symbol to reveal *who* or *what* it is because such a revelation would imply a transcendent, religious source. As a primordially alienated creature, the fallen self must await “news” from beyond itself, in Percy’s understanding the *euangelion*, to know once and for all who it is and what it should do. In the language of Kierkegaard’s “The Difference between the Genius and the Apostle,” the genius operates in the realm of immanence and yields knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*, or knowledge that holds true under the aegis of eternity in all times and all places; however, the apostle brings “news” (the *euangelion*) from a transcendent source relative to a particular person in a specific historical

moment (Percy, *The Message* 147). The triune God of the Christians is both immanent and transcendent, both inside time and outside time. God the Father stands outside time, while God the Son and God the Holy Ghost enter time. To use the language of St. Irenaeus, the Son and the Holy Ghost operate like the Father's hands, entering immanence from transcendence (Irenaeus 531). Thus, the self comes to understand its predicament as a fallen creature by entering into the unity of immanence and transcendence in the triune God. At this juncture, theology surpasses philosophy. Having discussed some of the primary coordinates in Percy's thought, I now transition to a discussion of how Percy responded to schools of thought important to the field of communication.

#### *Intersections with the Field of Communication: Schools of Thought*

Percy responded to several schools of thought important to communication studies, including information theory, General Semantics, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, structuralism, poststructuralism, and the New Rhetoric. Percy offered a textured reply to each school, finding those schools most agreeable that stressed the social origins of the "self" without dismissing it altogether. On the other hand, Percy took issue with those schools that adopted a dyadic approach to the study of communication, such as Ogden and Richards' New Rhetoric. As a realist, Percy critiqued the implicit nominalism in certain schools like General Semantics, which insisted upon the non-identification of word and thing. Words can in fact contain and reveal an underlying reality (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 74-75, 184-185). Understanding Percy's stance toward these schools grants the reader a better appreciation for how Percy might contribute to the field of communication. In the next section, I review the particular voices within the field of communication that utilized Percy in their own research.



While Percy does not offer an extended meditation on Shannon and Weaver's "information theory," reference to Shannon and Weaver's (1949) *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* appears in the bibliography of Percy's *The Message in the Bottle*. Percy hints at the inadequacy of "information theory" to capture the triadic nature of language (Percy, *The Message* 13-14, 165). Shannon and Weaver conceived of communication as the transfer of information between sender and receiver in a "channel" (Strate *Amazing Ourselves to Death* 47; McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media* 86-87). Shannon and Weaver's information theory, originally known as "communication theory," developed out of research on telephony during the 1920s and cryptography during World War II (Peters, *Speaking into the Air* 23). Shannon argued in a 1938 paper for a conception of "information" as a commodity, like any other, that could be processed (Beniger, *The Control Revolution* 408). Work in information theory (or "communication theory") led to the rise of computer science and to an interest in "signals" instead of "significance" (Peters, *Speaking* 23; Strate, *Amazing Ourselves to Death* 77). Over time, Shannon and Weaver's information theory has served as a foil for more interpretive approaches to communication as well as for media ecology (Klyukanov, *A Communication Universe* 53-57).<sup>7</sup> McLuhan and McLuhan write, "The Shannon-Weaver model of communication, the basis of all contemporary Western theories of media and of communication, typifies left-brain lineal bias" (McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media* 86). The sender-receiver model of communication stresses the elimination of "noise" that might disrupt the reception of a message (McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws* 87). Further, the Shannon-Weaver model explains communication in terms of efficient causality, the "only sequential form of causality" (McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws* 87). Percy would have rejected Shannon and Weaver's information theory

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<sup>7</sup> Note that Klyukanov seems to place the Shannon-Weaver model, rhetorical theory, and McLuhan's media ecology in the same camp (Klyukanov, *A Communication Universe* 53-57).

as rooted in the study of efficient, dyadic causes. The Shannon-Weaver model also takes for granted the hidden “ground” of meaning on which information transfer occurs, what Percy called a “world” (McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws* 87).

Beyond information theory, Percy critiqued General Semantics for its unwillingness to admit the real identification of words and things. Alfred Korzybski introduced General Semantics in 1933 (Strate, *Media Ecology* 19). General Semantics influenced the field of media ecology, especially thinkers such as Postman, Anton, and Strate (Strate, *Media Ecology* 19-20). According to Strate, General Semantics presupposes that human beings use language to make maps of their reality, which grow increasingly more abstract and removed from the concrete (Strate, *Media Ecology* 19). Korzybski insisted that “a map *is not* the territory” and that “a word *is not* the object it represents” (Korzybski 58). The word “pencil” is not the *pencil* itself. Anton writes, “General Semanticists routinely draw attention to the non-identification between the symbolic realm and first-order processes of reality” (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 69). Yet, as mentioned above, Percy believed that the word *is* the thing, albeit in a different mode of existence (*in alio esse*). In his essay “Semiotic and the Problem of Knowledge,” Percy writes,

Confronted by a pencil, Korzybski (1952) says, it is absolutely false to say that this is a pencil: to say that it is can only lead to delusional states. Say whatever you like *about* the pencil, but do not say that it is a pencil. “Whatever you might *say* the object ‘is’, well it is not” (35). (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 186)

Stuart Chase, another figure associated with General Semantics, complained of man’s “perverse habit of confusing words with things” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 46). In his 1938 *Tyranny of Words*, Chase writes, “Try as you may, you cannot eat the word ‘oyster,’ ....” (Chase 98; Chase as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 53). Percy replies, “You cannot eat the word ‘oyster,’

Chase (1938) assures us, but then not even the most superstitious totemistic tribesman would try” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 184). As Percy explains, saying what something *is* is a precondition for knowing anything about it at all (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 187). According to Percy, Chase and others disliked the identification of word and thing because such an identification could not be explained in causal, dyadic terms (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 54, 64). Solely because of their metaphysical assumptions, positivists like Korzybski and Chase could not admit a *real yet immaterial* identification of word and thing.

Behaviorism tried to explain language acquisition and language use in dyadic terms, too. Behaviorists tried to study meaning as occurring within a “casual-adaptive nexus” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 94). Throughout *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy lampoons behaviorists who desperately try to teach language to animals using the stimulus-response mechanism. Percy writes,

So anxious, in fact, have some people been to communicate with Washoe, the most famous chimp, that in the attempt to make signs for Washoe three psychologists have had their fingers bitten off for their pains. Alas for man: rebuffed again. (Percy, *Lost* 170)

For Percy, humans differ qualitatively from other animals because humans can use symbols. Though B. F. Skinner was alleged to have taught pigeons how to use “symbols,” Percy still considered Skinner’s experiment as trying to explain “*language, symbols, [and] sentences*” in dyadic terms (Percy, *Lost* 93). Morris, another behaviorist, considered the triadic symbol as a mere dyadic sign (Percy, *The Message* 269). Furthermore, Percy protested that the behaviorists simply dismissed immaterial realities such as consciousness, mind, soul, and self altogether. Watsonian behaviorism, for example, failed to discuss the emergence of “consciousness” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 150). Percy writes, “My difficulty with the behaviorists is that they rule out

mind, self, and consciousness as inaccessible either on the doctrinal grounds that they do not exist or on methodological grounds that they are beyond the reach of behavioral science” (Percy, *Lost* 86n-87n). Percy refused to reduce the mind to a byproduct of stimuli and responses.

Despite rejecting behaviorism’s dyadic approach to language, Percy appreciated the work of George Herbert Mead, a figure associated with “social behaviorism” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 141). Mead’s “symbolic interactionism” has influenced scholars in the field of communication, especially in interpersonal communication (Arnett, McManus, and McKendree, *Conflict between Persons* 108, 141; Fritz, *Professional Civility* 112; Roloff 113). While Percy disagreed with Mead’s “transposition of the stimulus-response schema to the societal level,” Percy admired Mead for not dispensing with the question of consciousness altogether like other behaviorists had done (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 151). Unlike Descartes and Chomsky, Mead stressed the social origins of the self (Percy, *Lost* 87). In his critique of Mead, however, Percy explained that consciousness involves more than just “the response of the organism to its own responses” (Percy, *The Message* 268). Consciousness emerges not in a matrix of causal sequences but as a product of triadic communication with another human being. Percy writes, “The act of consciousness is the intending of the object as being what it is for both of us under the auspices of the symbol” (Percy, *The Message* 274). Consciousness implies another human being to tell me what something *is* so that I might know with them (*con + scire*, “to know with”) (Percy, *The Message* 170, 274).

Like certain behaviorists, some French structuralists, poststructuralists, and deconstructionists dismissed the notion of the “self” altogether. Many communication scholars have drawn upon the work of French structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction, especially Foucault and Derrida (Biesecker; Chang 172; Gunkel). Lacan, a genealogical

descendent of structuralism and poststructuralism, continues to influence scholarship in rhetorical criticism (Gunn; D. Palmer 4, 12). Percy would certainly admit the need to dethrone the “autonomous self” from its position of privilege. Percy suggested that the grandiose expectations of the “autonomous self” led to the first two World Wars and would likely lead to World War III (Percy, *Lost* 157, 185-192). Rather than considering the self as *causa sui*, a cause of itself, Percy considered the self as derivative of the symbol function (Percy, *Lost* 82). Yet, Percy thought that certain French structuralists and poststructuralists went too far in their enthusiasm for the eradication of the self. Calling the self derivative of the symbol function does not mean reducing the self to a puppet of language (Brummans et. al 181). According to Percy, Levi-Strauss boasted “of the dehumanization which his structuralism implies” (Percy, *Lost* 87n). Percy writes, “Michel Foucault argues that with the coming of semiotics the concept of the self has vanished from our new view of reality” (Percy, *Lost* 87n).<sup>8</sup> Foucault advanced the notion that the being of language would eclipse “man” in *The Order of Things* (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 382-386). Foucault writes,

...the fact that in it [philosophy] perhaps, though even more outside and against it, in literature as well as in formal reflection, the question of language is being posed, prove no doubt that man is in the process of disappearing. (Foucault, *The Order* 385)

Foucault continues, “As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end” (Foucault, *The Order* 387). When addressing the question “Who speaks?” the poststructuralist might answer: Language itself (Foucault, *The Order* 305-307, 382; Foucault, “What is an Author?”; Ijsseling 130). Not only did structuralism

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<sup>8</sup> Percy likely read Pettit’s *The Concept of Structuralism*, which summarizes both Levi-Strauss’ and Foucault’s positions on the human subject (Pettit 38). Citing Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, Pettit writes, “[H]e [Foucault] argues that with the semiological sciences the concept of the human subject has vanished from our *Weltanschauung*” (Pettit 38).

and poststructuralism go too far with their dehumanizing ideas, but these currents of thought also put forward bizarre, jargon-laden theories. In his essay “Herman Melville,” Percy writes,

Now, there is a lot of real goofiness in structuralist criticism. One can imagine a structuralist critique of *Moby-Dick* in the style of Lévi-Strauss: a table of binary opposites listing right whales in one column and wrong whales in another, and the right whales are the sperm whales and the wrong whales are wrongly called right whales. (Percy, *Signposts* 199)

Percy also criticizes “deconstruction” and the absolute disavowal of authorial intention (Percy, *Signposts* 199). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy calls deconstruction the “whimsical stepchild” of French structuralism; he adds, “I do not feel obliged to speak of the deconstructionists” (Percy, *Lost* 87n). Despite its “goofiness,” however, Percy found some of what French structuralism advanced as true, such as the notion of “intertextuality” (Percy, *Signposts* 199). Writers write in community: “[T]here’s no such thing as a sovereign and underived text, except for possibly Faulkner....” (Percy, *Signposts* 199). Percy suggested reading *Moby Dick* while keeping in mind Hawthorne as an “intertext” for Melville (Percy, *Signposts* 199). Despite his reservations about certain strands of postmodern thought, Percy nevertheless acknowledged the importance of understanding writers in conversation with one other (cf. Bakhtin 91).

While perhaps not wholeheartedly agreeing with him, Percy appreciated the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. Percy lists the structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as one of the “friends” of his project in *Lost in the Cosmos* because Saussure offered a “fruitful analysis of the human sign as the union of the signifier (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*)” (Percy, *Lost* 85n). Nonetheless, as Berthoff suggests, Saussurian semiotics is dyadic because it leaves out the “act of knowing” (Berthoff, “I. A. Richards” 199-200; Percy, *The Message* 72). An analysis of

only signifiers and signifieds omits the most important part of all: the human being, which couples words and things. In other words, Saussurian semiotics appears to omit predication, or the act of judgment essential to knowledge (Ong, *The Presence of the Word* 151-158). Like Korzybski's emphasis on the non-identification of word and thing, de Saussure's nominalist structuralism also defined the relationship between words and things as arbitrary (D. Palmer 17-21). For the most part, structuralism and poststructuralism dismissed the self altogether (like the behaviorists) or stressed the non-identification between word and thing (like the General Semanticists). Percy would have found cause to reject the majority of structuralism and poststructuralism for both of these reasons.

Percy also replied to Ogden and Richards, two key voices in the New Rhetoric. Richards, who coined the term "New Rhetoric," suggested that a study of metaphor could reveal "how words work" (Berthoff, "I. A. Richards" 196). Further, Richards used the terms "tenor" and "vehicle" to investigate metaphor (Fogarty 36-38). Ogden and Richards' work in the New Rhetoric inspired key figures important to the field of communication such as Ricoeur, Burke, and McLuhan. Ricoeur utilized Richards' work on metaphor in his *The Rule of Metaphor* (Ricoeur 76-83). Ogden and Richards' scholarship in *The Meaning of Meaning* influenced Burke's understanding of invoking a "magical" name and speaking "in the name of" something (Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, 3-4). Burke also discussed Ogden and Richards in his *Rhetoric of Motives* when considering Malinowski's "context of situation," or the way that nonverbal and semiverbal elements factor into the meaning of a situation (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 64-65, 205-206; see also Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 90). Finally, Marshall McLuhan studied with Richards at Cambridge, and Richards' insistence on the importance of context and purpose informed McLuhan's study of media (E. McLuhan, Introduction to *Essential McLuhan*,

1; Gordon, Introduction to *Gutenberg Galaxy* xv). For McLuhan, the study of media should reveal the implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions in the nonverbal context for the sake of predicting and controlling technology for human purposes (Gordon, Introduction to *Gutenberg Galaxy* xv).

Percy disagreed with Ogden and Richards' understanding of Peirce, as well as their understanding of the meaning situation in terms of sign behavior. Ogden and Richards utilized Peirce's notion of "triadicity" in their study of meaning, dedicating a part of their appendix in *The Meaning of Meaning* to Peirce (Berthoff, "I. A. Richards" 199). Yet, Ogden and Richards tried to reduce the irreducible triadic relationship between namer, name, and named to a sequence of dyadic relationships (Fogarty 41-42; Percy, *The Message* 164, 199). Further, drawing upon Malinowski, Ogden and Richards' "contextual or sign theory of language" sought to make sense of South Pacific islanders fishing together in terms of sign behavior (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 71). For Ogden and Richards, words cause people to direct their attention to a particular thing (Percy, *The Message* 199). Ogden and Richards believed that causal relations held between thoughts and symbols (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 175). In other words, symbols cause thoughts, and thoughts cause symbols (Fogarty 41-42; Percy, *The Message* 164, 199). Ogden and Richards insisted upon an "imputed" relation, as opposed to a "real" relation, between word and thing (Percy, *The Message* 36-37; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 52-53, 176). Due to their unwillingness to admit the metaphysical identity between word and thing, Percy labeled Ogden and Richards as positivists and lumped them together with the General Semanticists, Korzybski and Chase (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 64). Yet, Berthoff implies that Richards, at least, was not a positivist because Richards appreciated the importance of "mediation" (Berthoff, "I. A. Richards" 197). Berthoff claims that Richards did not believe that



humans could have unmediated contact with reality (Berthoff “I.A. Richards” 197). Positivists might stress thought as preceding language and might consider language merely as the “garment of thought” (Berthoff, “I.A. Richards” 198). On Berthoff’s reading of Richards, however, language shapes thought (Berthoff, “I.A. Richards” 196-198). Nevertheless, Percy’s analyses in *Symbol & Existence* and *The Message in the Bottle* make it clear that Ogden and Richards subscribed to a dyadic understanding of language use. By implication, careful investigation might also reveal whether such dyadic presuppositions made their way into Burke, Ricoeur, and McLuhan.

Thus, Percy commented on several schools of thought important to the field of communication. To recap, Percy rejected those ideas that dismissed the self altogether, understood language in dyadic terms, or presupposed the non-identification between words and things. Nonetheless, Percy’s writing on each school reveals a textured engagement with thinkers and a willingness to grapple with ideas. For example, although Percy mostly rejected behaviorism, Percy appreciated the “social behaviorism” of George Herbert Mead. Percy’s willingness and ability to read scholars from a wide range of traditions contributed to the complexity of his thought. While not an existentialist, Percy appreciated certain existentialist insights, such as the “uniqueness of human existence” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 9; see also Percy, *Symbol & Existence*, 6-10, 18-22, 34). And in like manner, while not a devotee of scientism, Percy valued an empirical approach to the study of language use and abuse (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 36). In the next section, I transition from general schools of thought that Percy wrote about to particular voices within the field of communication that employed Percy’s ideas.

### *Intersections with the Field of Communication: Scholars Who Drew upon Percy*

Throughout the history of the field of communication, communication scholars have drawn upon Percy's work. Not only did Percy write in response to currents of thought that influenced the field of communication, but communication scholars also wrote about Percy and his ideas. Therefore, in this section I review how scholars in the field of communication have drawn upon Percy's work, especially in the areas of rhetoric, communication ethics, philosophy of communication, media ecology, and communication pedagogy. In order to compile the following research, I reviewed numerous communication journals, including international, national, and regional publications.

Rhetorical scholars have looked to Percy's writings for direction on the philosophical nature of language. Several articles in the field of communication have utilized or investigated Percy's article "Metaphor as Mistake" (Campbell; Caraher; Cleary; Engnell; Lessl; Osborn and Ehninger). "Metaphor as Mistake," which first appeared in *The Sewanee Review* in 1958 and later appeared in both *The Message in the Bottle* and *Symbol & Existence*, argues for the importance of metaphor as a cognitive trope. A good metaphor is in some sense an "error," the "wrong" word applied to something, which nevertheless reveals something inaccessible by other means (Percy, *The Message* 65-66). Analogical metaphors discover being (Percy, *The Message* 77). Cleary's 1959 essay "A Bibliography of Rhetoric and Public Address for the Year," the earliest article in the field of communication to cite Percy, highlights the importance of Percy's "Metaphor as Mistake." Cleary, the editor of *Speech Monographs* at the time, listed "Metaphor as Mistake" as one of the "more important publications on rhetoric and public address appearing in the year 1958" (Cleary 183, 201). Osborn and Ehninger (1962) cite Percy's "Metaphor as Mistake" in a footnote when discussing how the study of public address might benefit from

consideration of metaphor (Osborn and Ehninger 223n3). In his analysis of metaphors in *60 Minutes*, Campbell (1987) briefly highlights Percy's insight that metaphors discover being (Campbell 347). Lessl (1989) uses Percy's thoughts about the nature of metaphor to justify his use of the "priestly" metaphor when investigating scientific discourse (Lessl 185, 194). Caraher's (1981) article in *Philosophy & Rhetoric* considers the nature of metaphor. Despite grounding his epistemology in Kantian idealism, Caraher nonetheless approvingly cites Percy's comments on how metaphor yields knowledge (Caraher 83-88). In addition to the aforementioned interest in "Metaphor as Mistake," Robert L. Scott, well known for his article "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," reviewed Percy's book *The Message in the Bottle* in 1976 for *Communication Quarterly*. In his review, Scott speaks highly of Percy's phenomenological and novelistic approach to language, as well as Percy's triadic theory of meaning, although, Scott critiques Percy's repetitiveness (i.e., the repeated anecdote of Helen Keller learning the symbol "water") (Scott 51-52). In the final analysis, Scott praises Percy's work: "Fragmented as they may be, Walker Percy's insights shimmer with value" (Scott 52). While Percy never appeared to have written anything about the nature of "rhetoric," Percy's insights on language nevertheless appealed to many rhetorical scholars.

Several articles in the field have applied Percy's ideas to communication ethics. For example, Engnell's (2001) article in the *Southern Journal of Communication* offers one of the more detailed investigations into Percy's work. In particular, Engnell focuses on Gabriel Marcel's influence on Percy, as well as Percy's philosophy of denotation. Per Engnell, the combination of Marcel's axiological ontology and Percy's semiotics of denotation leads to an ethic of "creative fidelity" that can guide the evocation of holocaust-related language (Engnell 312). Engnell implies that the unreflective use of holocaust-related language in contemporary

political rhetoric diminishes the gravity of the holocaust (Engnell 312). Holocaust-related language becomes familiarized, which leads to a concomitant devaluation of the reality of the holocaust. Engnell uses Percy's denotative account of language to understand how "value is taken up into language" (Engnell 313). Mattson's (2012) essay in Fritz and Groom's edited volume *Communication Ethics and Crisis* uses Percy's *The Moviegoer* to suggest the possibility of sharing "epideictic discourse with others," despite the moral fragmentation of postmodernity (Mattson 13). In this essay, Mattson emphasizes the existentialists' influence on Percy while overlooking the influence of figures such as Aristotle, Aquinas, and Poincaré (Mattson 13). Mattson claims that Percy was not an Aristotelian (Mattson 13). At the very least, however, Percy advocated for Aristotle's understanding of the imagination and the soul (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 72, 96). Engnell's and Mattson's essays demonstrate the applicability of Percy's thought to ethical questions in postmodernity.

Others within the field have approached Percy's work from the perspective of the philosophy of communication. When discussing the indexical nature of language in her 1977 article in *Communication Quarterly*, Litton-Hawes turns to Percy's essay "Toward a Triadic Theory of Meaning" (Litton-Hawes 4, 4n8). The indexical characteristic of naming concerns our ability to imply or infer meaning when using or attending to demonstratives and pronouns (Litton-Hawes 4). Litton-Hawes recognized Percy, in addition to Husserl and Chomsky, as a key figure indicating the flexibility of language to convey meaning, oftentimes in ways that the then-prevailing "linguistic models" did not account for (Litton-Hawes 4). Anton, a scholar typically associated with both philosophy of communication and media ecology, has done much to bring Percy's thought into the field of communication. Reference to Percy appears in several of Anton's scholarly articles as well as Anton's (2011) *Communication Uncovered*. Like Percy,

Anton believes that speech provides insight into what it means to be human. In his 1998 article “Concerning Speech: Heidegger and Performative Intentionality” in *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, Anton writes, “Thus, in earnestly asking about the Being of speech, we are at root asking about the Being of the human” (Anton, “Concerning Speech” 142). Anton points out how Percy, like Heidegger, understood that a proclivity for theory can eclipse the magnificent particularity of a concrete existent (Anton, “Agency and Efficacy in Interpersonal Communication: Particularity as Once-Occurrence and Noninterchangeability” 168). As mere consumers of a symbolic “package,” individuals can elevate theory over and above existence (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 18). On this point, Anton utilized Percy to critique the prevalence of a consumer attitude in education (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 17-18). Furthermore, Anton’s 2007 article “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication: Insatiability, Context, Form” in the *Atlantic Journal of Communication* explores Percy’s understanding of “denotation” (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication” 81-84). Anton writes, “Denotation is thereby cast as a kind of valuation; it is an ability to equate what is not equal” (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication” 81). The spoken or written word involves equating a perceptible sound or visible mark with another perceptible object. Percy would suggest that the relation between these two nonequal, material entities is real (yet immaterial). However, Anton likens Percy’s understanding of how words relate to things with Korzybski’s belief in the non-identification of words and things (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication” 81). As mentioned before, Percy disagreed with Korzybski and other General Semanticists on how words relate to things. For Percy, the word *is not* the thing, *and* the word *is* the thing (*in alio esse*). Following Korzybski, Anton stresses the former, which tends to obscure the importance of the latter (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication” 81). Nonetheless, Anton points out

elsewhere the ironies of Korzybski's attempts to defend the non-identification between words and things by using "the very resources that he [Korzybski] calls into question" (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 64). In other words, Korzybski uses the resources of language, words themselves, to insist upon the non-identification between words and things; he relies upon the identifications inherent in language to argue for the non-identification of words and things (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 64). Altogether, Anton highlights the important intersection between semiotics and existentialism in Percy's thought: language use can induce both joy and despair (Anton, "On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication," 83).

While Anton clearly appreciates aspects of Percy's work, Anton finds Percy's work deficient in at least one area. According to Anton, Percy did not adequately account for alphabetic literacy or other mediums of communication when formulating his philosophy of denotation. Anton writes, "Like so many characterizations of denotative utterance, his [Percy's] fails to account for the multiple and varied impacts of alphabetic literacy (and other kinds of communicative technologies)" (Anton, "On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication," 84). While it is true that Percy did not investigate the full effects of literacy on human perception and social organization like media ecologists such as Havelock or Ong, Percy's other writings do reflect an interest in the impacts of other forms of mass media on shaping individual and collective expectations. As Percy once related in an interview with Hobson, "With a good theory of semiotics, we could get at what I was talking about before—what happens when people watch so much television" (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, "The Study of Consciousness" 225). Percy believed that television creates unrealistic expectations about easy resolutions to difficult predicaments in life (Hobson, "The Study of Consciousness" 220-221; Percy, "Decline of the Western" 182). Percy hoped to study different mediums more thoroughly. In a letter to Shelby

Foote, for example, Percy expressed his desire to “spend a few years figuring out *how* TV rots the brain (nobody knows)” (Tolson 427). Percy confessed to watching PBS and *The Incredible Hulk* and stated that “it would be interesting to figure out the nature of the effect television has had on people’s consciousnesses” (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “The Study of Consciousness” 220). Although the era of social media and smartphones came after Percy, Percy still lived through and commented upon the mass culture brought about, at least in part, by developments in communication technology.

Aside from Anton, other scholars working from the perspective of media ecology have written about Percy. Bennett briefly alludes to Percy’s *The Moviegoer* in her article about how technology erodes friendships (Bennett 254). Bennett describes the seductive allure of films and photographs, something demonstrated by Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer*; today so-called friends can easily opt for “‘catching up’ through images and posts on Facebook” rather than meeting face to face (Bennett 254). In his 2017 article “The Sacramental View of Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong and James Carey” in *Explorations in Media Ecology*, Cali draws upon Percy to describe a “sacramental view” of life. Cali writes, “Sacramental views expressed in literary and other art forms may thus be regarded as disruptive, distortive and extreme—upsetting of the pestilent conditions wrought by technology” (Cali 148). As evidence of the “disruptive” nature of Percy’s novels, Cali writes, “Percy’s wayfaring characters suffer stifling effects of scientism, technological deification and consequent abstractions: a ‘grave predicament’ of dislocation, disorientation and alienation” (Cali 148). Some of Percy’s characters suffer from making science and technology into idols. Will Barrett, the main character in Percy’s *The Last Gentleman*, for example, operates in a thoroughly abstract manner, relying upon conceptual “thinking” as his guide (Cali 148; see also Pridgen 298). The experience of ordeal can release individuals from

their abstractions, such as Ted in Percy's *Love in the Ruins* (Percy, *Love in the Ruins* 37). Cali cites McLuhan, who suggested, "Our only hope is apocalypse" (McLuhan as qtd. in Cali 150). Percy would agree. Apocalypse and ordeal strip away the conceptual schemes and abstractions that hinder engagement with existence. Altogether, Cali concludes, "...media ecologists who express a sacramental view perform a kind of catechism on the mediated world for those of us unlettered in the senses of the soul" (Cali 153). Although not typically characterized as a "media ecologist," Percy's critiques of scientism, abstraction, and "technological deification" place him the company of thinkers such as Ellul, McLuhan, Postman, and others. It is worth mentioning that Percy corresponded with Walter J. Ong, a key figure in media ecology. The Walker Percy Papers at UNC Chapel Hill contains correspondence between Percy and Ong.

Finally, some have applied Percy's ideas to pedagogy (Corder; Engen; Rex). Corder questions how rhetoric changes teachers (or how rhetoric influences how teachers teach) (Corder 4-5). In Corder's section on "generative ethos," Corder briefly mentions Percy when reflecting on how language entails a world for both speaker and hearer (Corder 33). Extending Percy's thought, Corder wishes to suggest that an "utterer" can speak in such a way so as to expand the "world" of meaning to encompass both the "utterer and receiver" (Corder 33-34). Corder stresses a conception of communication as "*invitation*" rather than as the transmission of information (Corder 33-34). For Corder, students benefit from going beyond the information transmission model of communication in order to consider how communication involves a meaningful world of discourse (Corder 33-34). Rex uses Percy's "Loss of the Creature" as a metaphor to discuss how certain "representations of reading, writing, and speaking" can get in the way of educating students (Rex 39). Engen reflects on how to cultivate a "communicative imagination" in the minds of students; teachers should interest students in communication and its applicability to



their lives (Engen 41). A communication teacher should not present mere “facts” but should “cultivate” a certain “attitude toward communication” (Engen 41). Engen mentions Percy briefly while discussing the role that teachers can play in students’ lives. Engen writes, “In short, as our students go about the business of, as Walker Percy would have it, ‘sticking themselves into the world,’ they need vision and they need leadership” (Engen 53). Teachers can provide “vision” and “leadership,” but good teachers can also “defamiliarize” the taken for grantedness of everyday life. A teacher today, much like a contemporary novelist, must use indirect methods to appeal to students who live in a mediated world that idolizes the autonomous self and lacks any sense of the sacred.

Altogether, Percy has had a significant influence on the field of communication. I have sought to foreground those articles in topic areas that I wish to focus upon in this dissertation, including rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.<sup>9</sup> Each of the aforementioned scholars in this section has recognized the importance and value of Percy’s thought. And yet, I contend that communication scholars could benefit from a more extended meditation on Percy’s ideas about “mediation,” a notion that hints at the prospect of a broad philosophical realism (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 235).

### *Implications of Percy’s Work and Preview of Chapters*

In the preceding sections, I reviewed Percy’s life in his historical moment, key coordinates in Percy’s thought, and intersections between Percy and the field of communication. In this section, I provide a preview of the chapters to come. I use Percy’s distinction between C1,

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<sup>9</sup> Percy appears briefly in other articles in the field, too, especially in book reviews, footnotes, and endnotes (Campbell 191-192; Hawes 15n18; Killingsworth 57; Payne 39n28; R. Smith, “Semiotics and Communication Theory” 209-210; Switzer et al. 398-399).

C2, and C3 consciousness as a paradigm to arrange the next three chapters (Percy, *Lost* 207-218, 211n-212n). In a comical exchange in *Lost in the Cosmos* between a spaceship from Earth and an alien species, Percy has a group of aliens question a human about the nature of their consciousness. “What’s your C-type? Are you C1? C2? C3? Over and out. Come back,” the alien asks (Percy, *Lost* 207). The earthling struggles to articulate an answer, but it slowly becomes clear why the alien wants to find out. Like Adam in the Garden, the aliens enjoy C1 consciousness, an Edenic, “preternatural” state of bliss that involves the joyful concelebration of being with others through symbol use (Percy, *Lost* 209). C1 consciousness is turned ecstatically outward (Percy, *Lost* 211n). But C2 consciousnesses, on the other hand, tend to be very dangerous and turned inward on themselves. The alien will not let a C2 consciousness come near. Why? The alien states, “A C2 consciousness is a consciousness which passes through a C1 stage and then for some reason falls into the pit of itself” (Percy, *Lost* 210). C2 consciousness involves self-consciousness, shame, deceit, lying, a proclivity for violence, deviant sexual behavior, and so on (Percy, *Lost* 209-211). In the broadest terms possible, C2 consciousnesses do not know who they are or what they are supposed to be doing (Percy, *Lost* 210-211). A C2 consciousness tries to conceive of its “self” as it conceives of everything else in the universe, a project inevitably doomed to failure (Percy, *Lost* 211n-212n). Finally, as Percy writes, “A C3 consciousness is a C2 consciousness which has become aware of its predicament, sought help, and received it” (Percy, *Lost* 212). C3 consciousness has become receptive to and received “news from across the seas,” the “message in the bottle” from a transcendent source (Percy, *The Message* 119-149). Further, C3 consciousness has come to understand its predicament “through auspices other than symbolic conception” (Percy, *Lost* 212n). These three different types of consciousness—C1, C2, and C3—correspond roughly to Eden, the Fall, and Redemption.

Thus, in the second chapter of this dissertation, I will explore what Percy called C1 consciousness, the Edenic state wherein symbols successfully mediate existence. The book of Genesis reads, “And Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and all the cattle of the field: but for Adam there was not found a helper like himself” (Gen 2:20 DRA; cf. Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 60). C1 consciousness names the world and experiences joy, much like Adam in the Garden. In this chapter, I will explore the intellectual roots behind Percy’s interest in the symbol: Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer. Cassirer influenced Langer, and both influenced Percy. Nonetheless, Percy struck out on a different, realistic path otherwise than Cassirer’s Kantian idealism and Langer’s naturalism. Symbols mediate but do not “constitute” reality. The idealistic preference for “constitution” claims too much for communication and refuses to place limits on what language can accomplish. The reduction of symbol use to a biological “need,” on the other hand, claims too little for the miracle of the symbolic breakthrough. After discussion of Cassirer and Langer, I will review the influence of Jacques Maritain on Percy’s thought. Maritain provided Percy with a realist understanding of how symbols operate. The symbol is the thing *in alio esse*, in a different manner of existence. After reviewing these formative influences on Percy’s thought, I consider some implications that an understanding of C1 consciousness has for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

In the third chapter, I explore C2 consciousness, which involves the failure of symbols to mediate existence. While symbols can reveal the *whatness* and *thatness* of being, leading to wonder, symbols can also induce a pernicious, solipsistic, alienating idealism. After discovering the joys of symbol use, the self eventually moves toward introspection, self-consciousness, higher degrees of abstraction, and individualism. Everything in the cosmos has a name, “but

what am I?” (Percy, *The Message* 284). Like the preceding chapter, this chapter will focus on several thinkers that influenced Percy’s thought: Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Martin Heidegger. According to Percy, Sartre provides a “masterly analysis” of phenomenological “deterioration,” the “sodden passivity of things” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). Sartre’s description of being-in-itself reflects the thingified world of C2 consciousness (cf. Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105). Further, Sartre’s phenomenological descriptions of “bad faith” demonstrate the self’s quest to disguise itself “as” something or another (Percy, *Signposts* 390). Beyond Sartre, Marcel’s descriptions of “simulacra” appear repeatedly throughout Percy’s work. Percy appreciated how Marcel had captured the capacity of existence to vanish beneath the symbolic simulacra (Percy, *Lost* 104; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105-106). Marcel also provided Percy with an anthropology that fit with Percy’s understanding of the human being. A human is *homo viator*, or man the traveler on a pilgrimage towards a transcendent home. After reviewing Sartre’s and Marcel’s influence on Percy, I discuss the place of Heidegger in Percy’s thought. Among other things, Percy drew upon Heidegger’s account of “everydayness” and Dasein’s fall into the “they,” which both reveal a better understanding of what Percy meant by C2 consciousness. I conclude the section on Heidegger by suggesting that Percy understood authenticity otherwise than Heidegger. Percy thought of authenticity as an intersubjective phenomenon, whereas Heidegger tended to stress the authentic individual. Like the previous chapter, I conclude this section by reviewing implications for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology. This chapter aims to problematize angelism, idealism, immanent consumerism, and ignorance, linking these phenomena to the failure of symbols to mediate existence. Further, this chapter seeks to respond to the overemphasis on the glories and

possibilities of symbol use, a temptation frequently faced by scholars of communication and rhetoric.

In the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation, I investigate C3 consciousness, or the redemption of C2 consciousness from its fallen state. In particular, I focus on how existence appears once more for C3 consciousness. I begin by distinguishing between true, religious C3 consciousness and pseudo C3 consciousness. True, religious C3 consciousness implies an awareness of the predicament of C2 consciousness and the need for help beyond the self. Pseudo C3 states, on the other hand, involve the temporary forgetfulness of the self as well as the momentary experience of community thanks to the mediation of the symbol. The creation and experience of art stands as an exemplar of pseudo C3 consciousness. The artist and audience enjoy momentary transcendence when creating or appreciating a piece of art. However, “reentry problems” follow after the accomplishment of pseudo C3 consciousness. After unpacking the basics of religious C3 consciousness and its secular analogues, I move onto a discussion of Viktor Shklovsky, the Russian literary theorist who informed Percy’s understanding of “defamiliarization,” the process of recovering existence from the symbolic simulacra. I suggest that Percy used art and ordeal, two tactics of defamiliarization, to move individuals toward true C3 consciousness. Next, I review the place of Kierkegaard and Aquinas in Percy’s thought. Kierkegaard’s critique of speculative philosophy and Kierkegaard’s distinction between the genius and the apostle informed Percy’s thought. Nevertheless, despite Percy’s appreciation of Kierkegaard, Percy sided with Aquinas on the harmony between faith and reason. Percy believed that in addition to “news from across the seas,” the apostle brought C2 consciousness the means of salvation, including the Church and the sacraments. Paradoxically, after reviewing the triumphs and failures of symbolic mediation in the preceding chapters, I conclude this chapter by

discussing the importance of a dyadic phenomenon: the sacraments. As a Catholic, Percy would have believed that the sacrament acted as an efficient cause upon the soul, infusing the soul with grace and thereby transforming it (Maritain, *Ransoming the Time* 226; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 121-122). Altogether, C3 consciousness recognizes its predicament and seeks help from an outside, transcendent source. Like the preceding chapters, I conclude this chapter by highlighting the implications of C3 consciousness for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

Percy's work has wide-ranging implications for the field of communication. Percy admits the merits of scientific and artistic practices while acknowledging their limitations. In most all human practices, the symbol plays a role. No mere special instances of communication, symbols thoroughly permeate the human condition (Percy, *Lost* 87; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 74). Indeed, the symbol can reveal real knowledge about existence. Nevertheless, the human condition, which includes the finality of death and the temptation to sin, requires a more all-encompassing hermeneutic than either scientism or nihilistic postmodernism can afford. Instead of conceding to modern scientific experts or to postmodern cynics, Percy provides a way of interpreting human communicative activity that takes both knowledge and ignorance, joy and despair, into consideration (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105, 134-135). Thus, Percy's insights into C1, C2, and C3 consciousness outline several promising avenues for the reconciliation of modernists and postmodernists, scientists and skeptics, idealists and materialists. C1 consciousness enjoys the splendor of being thanks to the mediation of the symbol. C2 consciousness repeatedly encounters symbolic reifications, the simulacra, which lead to undesirable existential states like boredom. Anxiety, too, follows upon the self not having an

adequate symbol for itself. Only in C3 consciousness does C2 consciousness find redemption and reprieve from the question of how to find one everlasting symbol for itself.

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## Chapter 2: C1 Consciousness, The Joy of Mediation

In Plato's *Cratylus*, Socrates discusses the correctness of names with his interlocutors Hermogenes and Cratylus. The dialogue centers around whether words apply to things by convention or by nature. Some names do in fact appear correct, while others do not. At one point in the dialogue, Socrates suggests that the pronunciation of the Greek letter lambda has a certain gliding quality to it, such that the word "olisthanein" ("glide") itself imitates the gliding movement of the tongue (Plato, *Cratylus* 427b). Percy uses this example taken from Plato's *Cratylus* as an entrance into a discussion on symbolic transformation. Despite the onomatopoetic nature of certain words such as "shaggy" or "limber," words that *seem* shaggy and limber, Percy thinks that the likeness between words and things (like the word "olisthanein" and the gliding of the tongue) is only an illusion (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 76, 82-83). Rather, words only seem to imitate that which they denote because of the remarkable process of symbolic transformation, whereby a symbol becomes a vehicle of meaning and merges with what it represents (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 76-81). Words and things do in fact interpenetrate but not because words isomorphically resemble the reality denoted (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 82). Rather, a relation of analogy, a proportion between likeness and unlikeness, holds between symbol and existence (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 82-90). Through analogy, the word becomes like a thing, so much so that a word's conventional nature all but disappears from view. Both "holy words" and "obscene words" strike us because they have taken up into themselves the existence denoted by them (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 81). In like manner, a pregnant woman becomes queasy by even the mere mention of some foods or objects; the word "freezer" has transformed into a nauseating thing, an icebox smelling of cold air and preserved meals. The name "formaldehyde" stinks of dissection, embalmed frogs, and Mr. Hoover's seventh grade classroom. The "bouquet of roses"

smells quite different. But how, specifically, do symbols (words, in this case) transform into things and thereby mediate existence?

The following chapter will trace out a response to this question by investigating what Percy calls C1 consciousness. The first part of this chapter will describe how intersubjectivity, joy, and concelebration of a world in common characterize C1 consciousness. I focus in particular on certain paradigm exemplars of C1 consciousness, especially Helen Keller. The second part of this chapter reviews the influence of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer on Percy's thought. While acknowledging the importance of Cassirer's and Langer's work on the symbol, Percy disagreed with Cassirer's idealism and Langer's naturalism. Rather than constituting the world or serving as a biological "need," the symbol allows human beings to sidle up alongside reality and to know it (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 102, 186-187; Wilhelmsen 40). The third part of this chapter will review the influence of certain realists on Percy's thought, especially Jacques Maritain, who provided Percy with a vocabulary for understanding how signs and symbols make known something other than themselves. Finally, I conclude with certain parallels between Percy's work and thinkers in rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

### *C1 Consciousness and the Symbolic Breakthrough*

In this section, I begin by providing a brief description of C1 consciousness. At bottom, C1 consciousness is "selfless" (Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos* 211n). C1 consciousness faces outward, symbolizing everything other than the self "through intersubjective transactions with others" (Percy, *Lost* 211n). Percy likens C1 consciousness both to the two-year old child who has just acquired language and to the primitive human who painted animals on the cave walls in

Lascaux, France (Percy, *Lost* 211n). Both the child and the primitive stand in a type of “preternatural” relation to the world of things and to others, having not yet fallen into the “pit” of themselves (Percy, *Lost* 209-210). The child and the primitive innocently identify symbols with things. The symbolic breakthrough involves the transformation of something sensuous—a spoken word, a written word, a painting, a gesture—into a vehicle of meaning. For those experiencing C1 consciousness, the sensuous symbol becomes the thing in an extraordinary, “unprecedented” way (Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* 157; Percy, “Symbol as Need” 387). In this section, I use various examples to illustrate the nature of C1 consciousness, including Helen Keller and Victor of Aveyron, two figures that Percy refers to. Reviewing examples of C1 consciousness will lead to a better appreciation of how Langer and Maritain influenced Percy, because both thinkers also took an interest in symbolic transformation in children and primitives.

Percy’s second daughter Ann played an important role in Percy’s understanding of language acquisition in children. Shortly after Ann was born, Percy and his family set out for a walk. Percy’s wife Bunt carried three-month old Ann while their other daughter, Mary Pratt, walked alongside them. A snake appeared along the way, which Percy killed with his shotgun. When Ann did not scream or cry at the sound of the gunshot, Bunt feared that something might be wrong with Ann’s hearing (Tolson 246). Sure enough, Ann suffered from hearing loss. Throughout Ann’s early years, Percy strove to get the best education for Ann as possible, eventually hiring a tutor by the name of Dorris Mirrieles (Tolson 246-249). Mirrieles’ pedagogical approach to the deaf exceeded the usual education for the deaf at the time. As Tolson writes,

While the traditional method reduced the deaf child to rudimentary signaling, using words as signals to satisfy needs, the Mirrieles method brought the full symbolic power

of language to deaf children. It taught them to use words as a means of knowing the world and themselves. (Tolson 249)

Thus, Mirrielees' approach confirmed the difference between sign and symbol identified by Langer and Percy (Tolson 249). It is by no coincidence that Percy discovered Ann's hearing loss in November 1954, the same year that he published "Symbol as Need," a review of Susanne Langer's *Feeling and Form*.

The anecdote of Helen Keller learning language plays an extremely important role in Percy's understanding of C1 consciousness. Percy began to take an interest in Keller while trying to reconcile the behaviorist account of language acquisition with the idealist account (Percy, *The Message* 30-34). The story of Helen's breakthrough into a world of meaning appears in her autobiography, *The Story of My Life* (Percy, *The Message* 30). At first, Helen responded to and used signs, as opposed to symbols. If Helen wanted a piece of cake, for example, she could spell the word "C-A-K-E" in Miss Sullivan's hand to indicate her desire (Percy, *Lost* 95; Percy, *The Message* 34). Everything changed for Helen, however, one day in the summer of 1887 at a well-house in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Sullivan traced the word "W-A-T-E-R" in one of Helen's hands while water gushed from a spout over Helen's other hand. After Sullivan repeatedly spelled the word in Helen's hand, Helen suddenly realized that the word "water" meant the cool, flowing stream of liquid (Percy, *The Message* 34-35). Helen recognized that the word *was* the thing *in alio esse*. As Percy writes, "Helen knows the water *through* and by means of the symbol" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 185). Being became intelligible for Helen in a radically unprecedented way because the symbol functions as a "discovery vehicle" for the cosmos (Percy, *Lost* 104). In her "pre-symbolic sentience," Helen had oriented herself toward the water in terms of biological adaptation and did not know what water *was* (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 99). After her

breakthrough, however, Helen understood the water “as” something (namely, “water”) (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 99). In her moment of realization at the well-house, Helen broke through into language and moved from experiencing the environment as a dyadic creature to understanding the world as a triadic creature. After learning the word for water, Helen set about trying to determine the name of everything else (Percy, *The Message* 173, 203, 259). On an ontological level, Helen wanted to know what everything *was* (Percy, *The Message* 203, 259). Percy writes, “This orientation is no longer biological; it is ontological” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 193). For Percy, Keller represents the dramatic shift from sign use to symbol use (Percy, *The Message* 280). Percy understands Keller as a representative anecdote for what happens in all two-year old children acquiring language in addition to the primitive human beings who first used language in a manner otherwise than biological adaptation (Percy, *The Message* 38, 44).

Importantly, Helen’s breakthrough into thirdness, what Percy called “the Helen Keller phenomenon,” always implies the existence of the other (Percy, *Lost* 209). In other words, Helen understood the water “as” “water” both for her and for Sullivan (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 99-100). Thanks to the symbol’s capacity to mediate existence, Helen could concelebrate the object with Sullivan as “being what it is under the auspices of the symbol” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 100). By knowing the object as something with another, Helen became conscious for the first time in the sense that she could “know with” another, just as the etymological root of the word “consciousness” implies (*con* “with” + *scire* “to know”) (Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land* 124-125). Percy writes, “Helen Keller’s memorable revelation was the affirmation of the water as being what it is. But an affirmation requires two persons, the Namer and the Hearer. *This is*

water means that this is water for you and me” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 192). The primordial naming situation requires two beings: self and other.

Helen Keller had Anne Sullivan to teach her symbols just as Ann Percy had Miss Mirrielees; and in like manner, all human beings who acquire language receive it from others. Left to their own devices, humans cannot create their own language *ex nihilo*. The case of Victor of Aveyron, a figure discussed by both Langer and Percy, demonstrated that learning to speak requires other human beings (Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* 119-121; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 55-56). Victor, the “savage of Aveyron,” survived in the wilderness apart from civilization for the first formative years of his early life (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 56). Victor had nobody to teach him language; hence, he could not speak. But Victor did not remain apart from others forever. A man by the name of Dr. Itard tried to teach Victor to use a word as “a sign of a want” in a purely utilitarian manner (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 56; Langer, *Philosophy* 119). Dr. Itard first withheld water from Victor and tried to get Victor to use the word “eau” to obtain water. When Victor failed to use the word “eau” as a sign, Dr. Itard repeated his attempt using milk instead of water. Dr. Itard wanted Victor to use the word “lait” as a sign to get Dr. Itard to pour milk into a cup. Yet, much to Dr. Itard’s chagrin, Victor pronounced the word “lait” only after the doctor had poured the milk. Moreover, Victor expressed sheer joy at having coupled the word “milk” with the white substance in the cup (Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* 119-121; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 55-56). As Percy writes, “He [Victor] had hit upon the symbol—the sudden incalculable inkling that the sound ‘lait’ is the white liquid in the glass” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 56). Victor discovered the symbol with the help of another and experienced wonder as a result. Sadly, Dr. Itard had so committed himself to the understanding of language as a mere instrument, a notion supported by Locke and Condillac, that he gave up



trying to teach Victor language altogether (Langer, *Philosophy* 121; Taylor, *The Language Animal* 3-5). As Langer writes, “Young children learn to speak, after the fashion of Victor, by constantly using words to bring things *into their minds*, not *into their hands*” (Langer, *Philosophy* 121). The examples of Helen Keller and Victor of Aveyron both testify to the importance of the other in language acquisition as well as the joy of coupling word and thing.

For Percy, the “sensible symbol” not only mediates existence but also plays a crucial role in mediating intersubjectivity (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 182). The question emerges as to whether intersubjectivity precedes the act of symbolization or not. Do individuals first intuit the presence of others and then learn to speak? Percy did not think so, and he disagreed with Hocking who posited that humans have a “direct experiential knowledge” of the other without which “the very ideas of ‘sign,’ ‘language,’ ‘other mind’ itself, could not arise” (Hocking 453; Hocking as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 182). Importantly, Percy pointed out that Hocking relied upon an understanding of intersubjectivity as “a direct *unmediated* bond” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 182; emphasis mine). Percy writes, “Hocking suggests that the symbol arises from the direct experiential knowledge that ‘We are.’ But surely it is that the ‘We are’ follows upon and is mediated by the symbolization, the joint affirmation that *this is water*” (Percy, *The Message* 281). Thus, Percy writes, “*Symbolization is of its very essence an intersubjectivity*” (Percy, *The Message* 281). The metaphysics of “We are” depends upon a recognition that this “is” such and such a thing for both you and me (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 165). And, as indicated in the first chapter, everything in the world (with the exception of the “self”) is precisely such and such a thing for you and for me because consciousness is always “of” something “as” something. The presence of the other stands not only as a “genetic requirement” for language acquisition but the “*enduring condition*” of consciousness (Percy, *Symbol &*

*Existence* 160). In other words, the conversation continues all day long, whether in utterances or in thought, interiorly or in the presence of others, until sleep comes. “I can debate with myself, hassle myself endlessly, and be so thoroughly conscious, knowing-with, that I can’t go to sleep. When the dialogue stops, consciousness stops. Sleep ensues” (Percy, *Signposts* 125). Even in his solitary dwelling on a deserted island, Robinson Crusoe writing in his journal was engaged in an exercise in intersubjectivity (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 181). All symbolic acts presuppose “a real or an ideal *someone else* for whom the symbol is intended as meaningful” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 160; see also “addressivity” in Bakhtin 95).

Percy’s essay “Symbol, Consciousness, and Intersubjectivity” spells out how symbolization mediates knowledge of a world shared in common with other human beings (Percy, *The Message* 265-276; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 139-165). In this essay, Percy critiques certain idealists and phenomenologists for failing to give an adequate account of intersubjectivity (Percy, *The Message* 266). Despite the merits of Husserl’s phenomenology, Percy found Husserl’s “famous epoché” too solipsistic (Percy, *The Message* 266-267, 272n). The “epoché” puts the reality of the external world “out of play” and allows the phenomenologist to study the entire world as it appears in consciousness and exists for the Ego (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* 19-21). Husserl’s phenomenology, a descriptive account of consciousness’ intentional acts, thereby problematizes contact with other selves who exist independently of the Ego (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 142-149). Husserl deals explicitly with charges of solipsism against his phenomenology in *Cartesian Meditations* and the preface to *Ideas* (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 89, 148, 150; Husserl, Author’s Preface to the English Edition xliii).<sup>1</sup> Like everything else, finding and recognizing the other becomes, paradoxically, a

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<sup>1</sup> Husserl suggests that the other’s ego appresents along with the presentation of their lived body (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 119, 121-122). A hidden view of a wall, for example, appresents itself along with a visible presentation

process of losing the world through the “epoché” and rediscovering him or her through a “universal self-examination” (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 157). In response to charges of solipsism, Husserl suggested that the Ego stood in a “co-transcendental” relationship to other selves (Husserl, Preface xliii; see also Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 146). Husserl also posited that the Ego constitutes the other along with itself and everything else in the world (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 84).<sup>2</sup> Due to his realist presuppositions, Percy could not accept that the Ego constitutes the other. Further, Percy could not see how the real existence of the other could survive the phenomenological “epoché” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 146-147). In addition to Husserl, Percy critiqued Cassirer for failing to recognize the importance of the other in consciousness. According to Percy, Cassirer committed himself to the Kantian understanding of the world as constituted by an “ego-consciousness” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). The analysis of Cassirer’s philosophical idealism below expands upon Cassirer’s debt to Kant. Altogether, Percy suggests that certain thinkers did not go far enough in recognizing that consciousness is always “of” something “as” something (Percy, *The Message* 272-274). Percy saw the symbol, especially the linguistic symbol, as a way out of solipsism. Percy writes,

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of a wall (109). I might see only part of a wall, and consciousness fills in the rest (everything unavailable to my senses). I might walk up to the wall and peer around a corner to see its hidden view; however, I cannot approach the other in a similarly more revealing way (109). The other’s psyche is inaccessible to me “originaliter” (“originally”) (112, 124). And yet, “‘In’ myself I experience and know the Other; in me he becomes constituted – appresentatively mirrored, not constituted as the original” (149). From the experience of myself and my own lived body, Husserl suggests that I analogically transfer sense and consciousness to the other (118). Despite his attempt to redress solipsism in *Cartesian Meditations*, the ontological problem of the other still remains. Even if I constitute and know the other within my consciousness, the phenomenological bracketing problematizes the reality of their *existence* beyond me (see also Collins 33-37). Who or what might grant existence to other things and selves, if not the transcendental Ego? As Collins has pointed out, the Ego in Husserl’s phenomenology resembles a deity: “The Husserlian self is immanently present to itself and hence is the self-founded beginning of philosophy without any assumptions, logical or ontological. Unlike the Cartesian self, however, it is endowed with many of the functions of deity, since the order of knowing is also the order of the foundation of being” (Collins 37).

<sup>2</sup> Husserl writes, “If (as is in fact the case) there are transcendently constituted in me, the transcendental ego, not only other egos but also (*as* constituted in turn by the transcendental intersubjectivity accruing to me thanks to the constitution in me of others) an Objective world common to us all, then everything said up to now is true, not alone in the case of my *de facto* ego and in the case of this *de facto* intersubjectivity and world, which receive sense and existence-status in my subjectivity” (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 84).

“[S]emiotics provides an escape from the solipsist prison [of idealism] by its stress on the social origins of language” (Percy, *Lost* 102). Percy writes, “The symbol is not only distinct from ego-consciousness, a *something else*; it implies a *somebody else*, for whom the symbol is meaningful” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). In short, idealism, having taken the ego as the starting point for all inquiry, cannot give an adequate account of intersubjectivity (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 186). Only a “broad semiotical approach” could account for intersubjective relations and “bring one into the territory of epistemological realism” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 186).

The anecdotes of Ann Percy, Helen Keller, and Victor of Aveyron demonstrate that the symbol mediates knowledge of existence. The child and primitive alike receive language and a world populated with meaning from others. Learning to speak puts us in touch with existence and other souls. While these examples of language acquisition inspired Percy, he also sought to ground his philosophy of communication in the thought of others who came before him, including Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, whose work I now turn to consider.

### *Cassirer and Langer: Symbolic Transformation*

This section will review the role that Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) and Susanne Langer (1895-1985) played in Percy’s thought, especially his understanding of symbolic transformation. First, I begin by reviewing how Cassirer influenced Percy. Cassirer, a German Neo-Kantian idealist, studied symbolic phenomena in various forms. In addition to Langer, Cassirer distinguished between signs and symbols. Cassirer also approached the study of symbols from an anthropological perspective, suggesting that the study of symbolic behavior would yield insight into the nature of what it means to be human, which Percy would have appreciated. However, Percy parted ways with Cassirer’s Neo-Kantian idealism in favor of realism: Humans do not

know symbols but rather know *through* symbols, which mediate existence. Percy believed that Cassirer omitted one of the most important and interesting aspects of symbolic phenomena: the symbolic transformation, the process whereby sensuous materials (spoken words, written words, etc.) come to mediate other real objects. Thus, the next part of this section reviews how Langer, an American philosopher interested in aesthetics and symbolic phenomena, accounted for symbolic transformation through a discussion of analogy. In order to serve as “vehicles for conception,” symbols must be analogical to that which they re-present. Finally, I discuss why Percy rejected both Cassirer’s and Langer’s conclusions about the nature of the symbol. Despite incorporating their insights on the symbol into his work, Percy refused to accept either Cassirer’s idealistic functionalism or Langer’s naturalism.<sup>3</sup>

Reference to Cassirer appears throughout Percy’s works. Percy seems to appreciate all that Cassirer has done to underscore the importance of the symbol (Percy, *The Message* 202n). Citing Cassirer’s *An Essay on Man*, Percy explains how Cassirer distinguished between human and animal communication (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 33). Cassirer writes, “The difference between *propositional language* and *emotional language* is the real landmark between the human and the animal world” (Cassirer, *An Essay on Man* 30). Cassirer understood that making propositions differs radically from merely responding on a biological level (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 33, 47). Although Percy mostly turns to Langer for a discussion of the difference between sign and symbol, Cassirer also outlined the difference between sign and symbol, even using Helen Kellen as a representative anecdote to illustrate symbol use (Cassirer, *An Essay* 31-

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<sup>3</sup> Langer herself seems to eschew any religious commitments. Langer writes, “That man is an animal I certainly believe; and also, that he has no supernatural essence, ‘soul’ or ‘entelechy’ or ‘mind-stuff,’ enclosed in his skin” (Langer, *Philosophy* 40). For his own part, Cassirer came from a Jewish background; despite becoming Rektor of the University in Hamburg in 1929, Cassirer later emigrated with his family in 1933 when the Nazis came to power (Jensen n.p.). Nonetheless, Percy focuses his attention primarily on these thinkers’ philosophical commitments: Langer’s naturalism and Cassirer’s idealism.

34).<sup>4</sup> After relating Keller's symbolic breakthrough, Cassirer argues that "*everything has a name*—that the symbolic function is not restricted to particular cases but is a principle of *universal* applicability ...." (Cassirer, *An Essay* 35). Percy would agree (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 98-103). As mentioned above, Cassirer may have even given Percy the inspiration to approach the study symbols from an anthropological perspective, as a study in what it means to be human (Cassirer, *An Essay* 319; Percy, *The Message* 11). Without the symbol, human life would consist in nothing more than the fulfilment of biological needs or "practical interests" (Cassirer, *An Essay* 41). Without question, then, Cassirer played a major role in advancing Percy's thought on the nature and scope of symbolization.

Nonetheless, Cassirer's thought on the nature of the symbol remained thoroughly entrenched in German idealism. Referring to Cassirer's work, Percy writes, "But the empirical insights [into the symbol] are so submerged by the apparatus of German idealism that they are salvaged only with difficulty" (Percy, *The Message* 202n-203n). Following Kant's lead, Cassirer proposed to explore the *a priori* symbolic forms that constitute reality in his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume One: Language* (Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume One: Language* 73-114; Hendel, Introduction 1-12). Not content with "ontological metaphysics," Cassirer prioritized the study of the "function" of thought over and above any independently existing reality (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 79). When the symbol takes absolute priority in the act of knowing, everything else seems to recede from awareness, especially existence (Percy, *The Message* 32-34). The various "forms" of thought—whether scientific, mythical, or religious—give shape to the world, in Cassirer's understanding. Thus, Cassirer writes, "[T]hey [the *a priori* forms] become multiple efforts, all directed toward the one goal of transforming the

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<sup>4</sup> Cassirer does not cite Langer when relating the Helen Keller anecdote in *An Essay on Man*.

passive world of mere *impressions*, in which the spirit seems at first imprisoned, into a world that is pure *expression* of the human spirit” (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 80-81). Without the active shaping of the *a priori* forms, all experience would consist of chaos and void (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 107). Cassirer writes, “Myth and art, language and science, are in this sense configurations *towards* being: they are not simple copies of an existing reality but represent the main directions of the spiritual movement, of the ideal process by which reality is constituted for us as one and many—as a diversity of forms which are ultimately held together by a unity of meaning” (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 107). Intelligibility emerges only after the *a priori* symbolic forms have intervened. Cassirer writes, “Cognition, language, myth and art: none of them is a mere mirror, simply reflecting images of inward or outward data; they are not indifferent media, but rather the true sources of light, the prerequisite of vision, and the wellsprings of all formation” (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 93). Cassirer’s insistence upon how symbolic forms give shape to reality obscures how existence pushes back upon our *a priori* constructions of the world. The notion of “recalcitrance,” the stubbornness and concreteness of the world of things and others, seems lacking in Cassirer’s thought (Burke 255-261; Crawford 31-206).

Unlike Cassirer, Percy does not agree that symbols constitute the world (Percy, *The Message* 203n; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). Cassirer found himself responding to rationalists and empiricists alike and perhaps saw Kant as providing a way to reconcile these two opposing approaches to epistemology. Cassirer attributes the axiom “Nihil est in intellectu, quod non ante fuerit in sensu” to sensationalism, a school of epistemology that reduced mental states and reasons for belief to sense perception alone (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 110; “Sensationalism”). This axiom, which translates to “Nothing is in the intellect that was not first

in the senses,” undoubtedly belonged to the Scholastics and to the Peripatetic School of Aristotle before any sensationalists may have claimed it for their own (see Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody*, 135; Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate*, q. 2 a. 3 arg. 19; Aristotle, *De Anima* 432a5-10). Why is this significant? In the least, Cassirer’s rejection of the Peripatetic axiom matters because by rejecting it, Cassirer had to find another place to ground knowledge otherwise than existence: the *a priori* forms of consciousness (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 110-111). For Percy, things exist both before and after human consciousness. The existence of real human beings and real referents stands as a precondition for symbolization, and thereby knowledge (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 234). A real world consisting not only of ideas but also of existents in their unique particularity must exist for symbolization to occur (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 234). For Cassirer, on the other hand, “The ‘real’ object tends to vanish into Kant’s noumenon” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 162). Indeed, the “thing in itself,” reality as it is, appears as nothing more than a “fallacy in formulation, an intellectual phantasm” to Cassirer (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 111). Cassirer writes, “[F]or the highest objective truth that is accessible to the spirit is ultimately the form of its own activity” (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 111). Cassirer thinks that symbol does all the work in the act of knowledge, rendering the otherwise unknowable noumenon meaningful (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 80-81; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). Percy writes, “In Cassirer’s view, the interpenetration of symbol and thing is almost entirely a one-way street; the thing is specified by the constituting power of the symbol” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). Cassirer writes, “Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself” (Cassirer, *An Essay* 25; Cassirer as qtd. in Postman 10). By implication, in Cassirer’s view, humans do not know reality but instead know symbols



(Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). If humans only know symbols, the extensions of themselves, then meaning is solely a human creation. Percy does his best to return meaning and significance to its rightful place: the ground of existence.

Contra Cassirer, humans do not know the symbol itself but do in fact know existence “through” the symbol (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). Percy writes, “But what is not taken into account [in Cassirer’s view] is that the [symbolic] transformation is above all *intentional*. The symbol is always a symbol *of* something and what we know is not the symbol but *through* the symbol ....” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). The symbolic transformation, then, relies upon existence. When symbols yield knowledge of existence, the symbol serves “as a transparent intentional instrument through which the thing is known” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). As Sr. Miriam Joseph has explained, the symbol “disappears” before its intentional object in ordinary usage (Sr. Joseph 36-40). And as other realists have been quick to suggest, the symbol is not that which is known but “that by which” existence is known (Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes* 14-15, 66; Grabowsky 26; Thompson 201). Percy thought that Cassirer had asked the right question, namely, “[H]ow can a finite and particular sensory content be made into the vehicle of a general spiritual ‘meaning’?” (Cassirer, *Volume One: Language* 93; Cassirer as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). In other words, how can something sensuous become a means for spiritual content? Only, Cassirer offered a deficient reply to his own question and failed to describe the actual act of symbolic transformation, whereby the sensuous symbol becomes a vehicle for real meaning (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 91). Percy writes, “In Cassirer’s view, nothing is actually *transformed*: an unknown and unknowable something is merely given its *first* formulation” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 92). On the other hand, Percy believed in a “mutual articulation and interpenetration” of word and thing (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 92). Despite his

disagreement with Cassirer's metaphysics, Percy still called Cassirer "the great German philosopher of the symbol" (Percy, *The Message* 153). Langer also had a great deal of respect for Cassirer. In her preface to the first edition of *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer calls Cassirer "that pioneer in the philosophy of symbolism" (Langer, Preface to the First Edition xv). Langer also translated Cassirer's *Language and Myth* into English. Yet, Langer did not fall prey German idealism, preferring instead to give a naturalistic explanation of symbol use (Langer, *Philosophy* 40-41).

In addition to distinguishing between sign and symbol, Langer sought to investigate the symbolic transformation of sensuous experience by the mind. According to Percy, both Langer and John of St. Thomas identified the "unique property" of the symbol: "that it in some sense comes to contain within itself that which is symbolized" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 74). Langer writes, "Symbols are not proxy [sic] for their objects, but are *vehicles for the conception of objects*" (Langer, *Philosophy* 60-61). Symbols allow humans to think "about" things rather than simply respond to them (Langer, *Philosophy* 221-223). If you say the word "ball" to a dog, the dog may go and look for their ball, having responded to the word as a sign; but if you say "ball" to your spouse, then he or she might respond, "What about it?" (Percy, *The Message* 153; see also Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* 30-31). Symbols set humans at a distance from the play of dyadic interactions. Langer writes, "Instead of announcers of things, they [symbols] are reminders" (Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* 31). Symbols allow humans to think about things in their absence; as a human, you can think about your food after having eaten it (Anton, "Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Synergism: Notes on 'Lanigan's "Encyclopedic Dictionary"'" 52; Langer, *Philosophy* 105, 135). Langer calls symbolization the "essential act of the mind" and "the starting point of all intellection in the human sense" (Langer, *Philosophy* 41-42). Although

transcendent at first and in artistic activity, symbolization is absolutely mundane. Humans constantly interpret signs and symbols, the “warp” and “woof” of the conscious experience of reality (Langer, *Philosophy* 280). Langer uses both dreams and humanity’s historical proclivity for magic as examples of the constant human “need” to symbolize experience (Langer, *Philosophy* 37-41). Upon going to sleep, the mind continues “actively translating experiences into symbols, in fulfilment of a basic need to do so” (Langer, *Philosophy* 41-42). Contra utilitarian interpretations of the symbol, dream symbols serve “no practical purpose” (Langer, *Philosophy* 37). Through magic and ritual, primitive man transforms experience and thereby makes better sense of it (Langer, *Philosophy* 48, 126, 158-159). Langer writes, “Whatever purpose magical practice may serve, its direct motivation is the desire to symbolize great concepts” (Langer, *Philosophy* 49). But certain questions remain, which Percy insists upon having answered. Concerning symbolic transformation, Percy asks, “What exactly is changed and into what? How does the change take place?” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 75).

Arguably, Langer’s understanding of analogy provided Percy with a means for making sense of how symbolic transformation occurs (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 74-94).<sup>5</sup> Chapter three of Langer’s *Philosophy in a New Key*, entitled “The Logic of Signs and Symbols,” highlights the importance of analogy in symbolic transformation. In order for a symbol to serve as a vehicle of meaning, a symbol must not immediately resemble that which it represents. Percy invites his reader to consider again the case of Victor of Aveyron. Imagine that instead of trying to get Victor to use the spoken word “lait” to request a glass of milk, Dr. Itard set a picture of a glass of milk alongside the real thing. According to Percy, Victor would not have made the leap, the symbolic breakthrough, that he made when he coupled the spoken word “lait” with the liquid in

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<sup>5</sup> I.A. Richards, too, provided Percy with the requisite vocabulary of vehicle and tenor for making sense of symbolic transformation (see Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 85, 87, 217-218, 221).

the glass. Instead, Percy suggests that Victor would have seen two glasses of milk (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 82, 86). The distinction between univocity (likeness), equivocity (unlikeness), and analogy (a proportion between likeness and unlikeness) becomes important here. In order for symbolic transformation to occur, the symbol must be neither univocal nor equivocal but analogical to the thing that it symbolizes. In Victor's case, an iconic copy would have univocally represented the milk. But the spoken word served as an adequate vehicle for conception in this case, as well as in all human language acquisition—both in children and in primitive peoples.<sup>6</sup> Percy calls the spoken word “a skeleton waiting to be fleshed” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 88). Percy writes, “In the vocable, then, the transforming power of the symbolific function is provided a framework of polarities and heterogeneities in which it can detect analogies and on which it can deposit the living flesh of the word” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 90). On this point, Langer writes, “[W]ords are *naturally available* symbols, as well as very economical ones” (Langer, *Philosophy* 75). Langer continues, “[T]hey [words] have no value except as symbols (or signs); in themselves they are completely trivial” (Langer, *Philosophy* 75). Finally, Langer writes, “The more barren and indifferent the symbol, the greater is its semantic power. Peaches are too good to act as words; we are too much interested in peaches themselves” (Langer, *Philosophy* 75). Langer points out that humans instinctively babble, but apes do not (Langer, *Philosophy* 105). Babbling in children provides the requisite material, the perceptual sounds, for symbolic transformation to occur. The availability and economy of the spoken word, combined with the fact that humans do not have earlids (as they have eyelids), make the spoken word the readiest medium for human communication (Langer,

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<sup>6</sup> Recall the cat or the dog who, not having the ability to understand symbols, sees only a canvas instead of a portrait (Langer, *Philosophy* 72). Dogs may watch TV, but they will not understand it. Why? Dogs see duplicates of things (e.g., of other dogs)—not symbols of them (cf. Langer, *Philosophy* 68-72).

*Philosophy* 75, 116-117, 129-130). Anything may become a symbol, but the spoken word happens to work best for transforming one thing (a sight, a feeling, a touch, etc.) into another (a sound) (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 88; cf. McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 88-89).

Ultimately, Percy parts ways with Cassirer and Langer due to their failure to recognize that symbols can yield real knowledge of existence. Percy critiques both Cassirer and Langer, despite their insights into the nature of the symbol, because neither thinker recognizes the full epistemological implications of the symbolic breakthrough. Unlike the idealist or the naturalist, Percy rejects progress or development as adequate criteria for judging symbols (Percy, "Symbol as Need" 387). The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is something more than simply "a 'higher form'" of a "native dog dance" (Percy, "Symbol as Need" 387). Further, symbols do more than simply integrate groups of people. Percy writes, "Thus, the idealist Cassirer would agree with [the] functionalist Malinowski in evaluating myth not according to a true-false scale but by its immanent role in integrating society, in conceiving the world" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 26). Judging symbolic activity based solely upon its ability to integrate human communities, however, conceals the fact that certain symbolic utterances can unite people for the worse, as totalitarian states in the twentieth century proved (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 28-29). Thus, human symbolic activity, the instrument for knowing anything at all, cannot be evaluated by anything but the truth itself (Percy, "Symbol as Need" 390). Note that Percy does not claim to possess the truth in every case once and for all. Percy only claims that the symbol makes truth (and thereby error) possible. Responding to both naturalists and idealists, Percy asks, "If the language symbol is not just a sign in an adaptive schema, and if it does not itself constitute reality but rather represents something, *then what does it represent?*" (Percy, "Symbol as Need" 389). Percy answers that the symbol represents nothing less than existence. If words represent

things, it is not in the manner of a copy or a duplicate. Rather, the word re-presents the thing itself *in alio esse*. By considering symbolic transformation, Percy shows us that words actually re-present things; words have become things, taken existence up into themselves, and disappeared as intentional objects in the process.<sup>7</sup> Percy likely came to this understanding of words by reading and extending upon the work of Jacques Maritain, whose ideas I now turn to consider.

### *A Realist Account of the Symbol*

This section reviews how Percy's realist understanding of the symbol differed from Cassirer's and Langer's understandings of the symbol. First, I discuss Jacques Maritain's (1882-1973) influence on Percy, especially Maritain's essay "Sign and Symbol." In addition to explaining the role of the sign in mediating knowledge, Maritain distinguished between "instrumental signs" and "formal signs," which I unpack below (Maritain, "Sign and Symbol" [*Ransoming the Time*] 218-220, 222-223). Formal signs function like Percy's "symbol" insofar as they "disappear" before the objects that they intend. The formal sign differs from the symbol insofar as the former is a purely mental entity whereas the latter is a sensuous entity capable of empirical study. Second, I review the role of the imagination in the act of knowing, which relates to Maritain's discussion of formal signs. An angelic approach to epistemology attempts to bypass the imagination as a necessary component for knowing, an approach that Maritain, Percy, and other realists since Aristotle have taken pains to avoid. Reviewing certain realists' understanding of the role of the imagination in the act of knowing serves as an occasion to reflect upon where

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, some might say that "things" is a word; however, I would also add that the word "word" is a sensible thing on this page (cf. Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 44-45). Arguably, distinguishing between "first intention" and "second intention," between the use of a word to intend existence and the use of a word to refer back to itself, resolves many of the problems that revolve around confusing things with words and vice-versa (Sr. Joseph 36-40).

Percy appears to have parted ways with Maritain and other twentieth century Thomists. Instead of focusing in on the formal sign, a phantasm, a mental image in the imagination, Percy focuses his attention on the sensuous, empirical symbol. Finally, I conclude with a brief discussion of the “direct sign” and “reverse sign” as these terms appear in Maritain’s work. While this section primarily reviews the “direct sign,” which C1 consciousness makes use of by looking outward, symbolizing and knowing things other than itself, consideration of the “reverse sign” will help build a bridge to the next chapter on C2 consciousness.

Thus, Maritain provided Percy with a way to understand the symbol otherwise than Cassirer and Langer.<sup>8</sup> Maritain—a French, Catholic philosopher and convert to Catholicism—loomed large as one of the primary Thomistic voices in the twentieth century. Maritain wrote a number of important works, including *Art & Scholasticism*, a Thomistic work on aesthetics that had an especial impact on Percy.<sup>9</sup> Both Percy and Flannery O’Connor read *Art & Scholasticism*, which influenced their approach to art. For Maritain, art does not traffic in mere emotions but involves the intellect (Maritain, *Art & Scholasticism with Other Essays* 10, 21). Art may produce emotions but only as a consequence of aiming at the truth (Maritain, *Art & Scholasticism* 58-59,

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<sup>8</sup> Maritain, Langer, and Cassirer wrote key works that influenced Percy between 1920 and 1950, making these thinkers contemporaries. Percy seems to have concentrated his attention on Langer’s and Maritain’s insights, especially in his first published essay “Symbol as Need,” which appeared in print in 1954. However, Cassirer published his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Volume One* in 1923. Thus, both Langer and Maritain were responding, at least in part, to Cassirer. As mentioned above, Langer acknowledged her debt to Cassirer in the Preface to the First Edition of *Philosophy in a New Key*, written in 1941 (Langer, Preface to the First Edition xv; see also Langer, *Philosophy* 21). In his introduction to “Sign and Symbol,” Maritain suggested that someone should write a treatise linking medieval theories on the sign and symbol with contemporary developments of his time, including the insights of the Warburg school of thought (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 217). “Sign and Symbol,” which later appeared in Maritain’s (1948) *Ransoming the Time*, was published in the inaugural July 1937 issue of the *Journal of the Warburg Institute* (see Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Journal of the Warburg Institute*]). Cassirer presented studies and lectures on symbolic forms in the early 1920s at the Warburg Library in Hamburg, Germany (“Ernst Cassirer”). Roughly twenty years later, Cassirer wrote *An Essay on Man* in 1944 to make his writings on symbolic forms more accessible to a wider audience (Cassirer, Preface). Thus, Maritain, Langer, and Cassirer prepared the way for Percy’s work on the relationship between symbol and existence, which began in the 1950s (Ketner et al. vii).

<sup>9</sup> Percy cites a number of Maritain’s works, including *Ransoming the Time*, *A Preface to Metaphysics*, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, and *Art & Scholasticism* (Percy, “Symbol as Need”; Percy, *Symbol & Existence*). Tolson also identifies Maritain’s *The Dream of Descartes* as an important book for Percy (Tolson 237).

65, 97n4-98n4, 128, 171-173). In like manner, Percy argued for art as a form of making and appreciation as a form of knowing, “intellectual but peculiarly distinct from discursive knowing” (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 384). Maritain taught Percy that true art does not neglect the intellect but in fact relies upon it (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 383). Percy even used Maritain’s Thomistic categories in *Art & Scholasticism* to critique the second novel of his friend Shelby Foote (Tolson 216). After publishing “Symbol as Need,” Percy wrote another philosophical essay utilizing Maritain’s ideas, which did not seem to find its way into print until the publication of *Symbol & Existence*. Percy sent his essay, which concerned the relationship between the symbol and “magic cognition,” to Maritain, who gave a favorable response to Percy (Tolson 244). If the original essay appeared anything like the two chapters on “magic cognition” found in *Symbol & Existence*, then the essay that Percy sent to Maritain likely included insights derived from Maritain’s essay “Sign and Symbol.”

In his essay “Sign and Symbol,” Maritain highlights the importance of signs and symbols in the process of knowing anything at all. Importantly, Maritain does not draw upon Langer or use the language of dyadic and triadic to distinguish signs from symbols.<sup>10</sup> Rather, Maritain follows the scholastics in defining the “sign” as “that which makes present for knowledge something which is other than itself” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 218).<sup>11</sup> A sign operates as a “substitute or a vicar” to make something else known: “it *takes the place*” of something else (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 218). Further, Maritain distinguishes between “instrumental signs” and “formal signs.” An instrumental sign is

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<sup>10</sup> Maritain defines the symbol as “being a *sign-image* (at once *Bild* [image] and *Bedeutung* [meaning]): something sensible signifying an object by reason of a presupposed relationship of *analogy*” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 219).

<sup>11</sup> For Maritain, the speculative sign “makes manifest something other than it is,” while the practical sign “communicates a stimulation, an appeal” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 253). Unlike speculative signs, practical signs do not make known an object but signify “an intention and a direction of the practical intellect” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 224).



that which is known “*beforehand*” and leads to knowledge of something else (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 222). Take the example of smoke and fire. Smoke stands for fire and functions as a “vicar” for the fire. In this instance of a “natural sign,” smoke signifies fire and not water because a real relationship (as opposed to an ideal relationship) exists between the sign and the signified (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 218-219). As another example, the instrumental sign of an orange sky on the horizon heralds the coming of the sun and the disappearance of night. A formal sign, on the other hand, is that *by which* something else is known (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 223). Formal signs still function as “vicars” for their objects, but they themselves “disappear” as intentional objects and thereby make knowledge of other things possible (Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* 119; Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 223). In *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain writes,

A formal sign is a sign whose whole essence is to signify. It is not an object which, having, first, its proper value for us as an object, is found, besides, to signify another object. Rather, it is anything that *makes known*, before being itself a known object. More exactly, let us say it is something that, before being known as object by a reflective act, is known only by the very knowledge that brings the mind to the object through its mediation.<sup>12</sup> (Maritain, *Degrees* 119)

An understanding of mediation stands at the heart of how formal signs function. In this case, formal signs function as mental entities that mediate knowledge of existence: Concepts in the memory and images in the imagination operate as formal signs (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 222). My memories of my wedding, for example, function as formal

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<sup>12</sup> Maritain uses the term “presentative form” and the Scholastic term “species” to refer to “formal signs” (Maritain, *Degrees* 119).

signs. I do not know my memory itself. Rather, I know the past itself through the mediation of memories (Maritain, *Degrees* 120). Thus, the use of signs does not imply mere “inference and comparison” but rather the real “presence” of the signified in the sign (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 220). To repeat, the signified is in the sign *in alio esse* (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 220). The intentional object of thought present to the mind and the actual, existing object intended by the sign do not result in two separate entities but rather one and the same entity in two different modes of existence (Maritain, *Degrees* 121-123). The knower is really and truly united to the known not on a material plane but on an immaterial plane thanks to the mediation of formal signs (Maritain, *Degrees* 117-118).

Importantly, signs operate on the level of formal causality as opposed to efficient causality. The terms “formal cause” and “efficient cause” derive from the Aristotelian and later Thomistic vocabulary for making sense out of how something comes to be what it is.<sup>13</sup> At basic, when Maritain states that the sign operates on the level of formal cause as opposed to efficient cause, he means that the *form* of the object intended by the sign takes its place in the intellect of the knower, which yields real knowledge of the thing itself (because the thing itself is present to the mind *in alio esse*) (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 219). Maritain writes, “The sign does not even produce as an efficient cause the knowing of the signified ....” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 219). Rather, according to formal causality, the sign “takes the place of the object” signified in the cognitive faculty (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 219). Formal causality facilitates the simultaneous, immaterial union of knower and known incomprehensible in terms of efficient causality, stimulus and response, antecedent cause and subsequent effect. On this point, Percy writes, “Knowing is not a

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<sup>13</sup> For more on Aristotle’s four causes, including formal and efficient cause, please see Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy* Ch. 6.

causal sequence but an immaterial union. It is a union, however, which is mediated through material entities, the symbol and its object” (Percy, *The Message* 263-264). Here, Percy skips over the idea of formal signs as purely mental entities and instead emphasizes the sensuous, material nature of symbols and objects capable of mediating immaterial knowledge.

Nevertheless, the difference between formal causality and efficient causality remains important here because Percy does not believe that symbols operate in a dyadic manner (i.e., according to the order of efficient causality). What happens if humans understand symbols solely in terms of efficient causality instead of formal causality? Instead of instruments of knowledge, symbols become mere efficient causes, the means for making things be at the exclusion of making things known (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 233-234). Undoubtedly, signs can function in a practical manner to exhort, tell, command, request, and even bring about certain social arrangements (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 224). Yet, signs do not and cannot remain merely on the level of efficient causality because they belong to a different ontological plane (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 234-235). This confusion between efficient causality and formal causality, Maritain thinks, helps to explain “sympathetic magic” in primitive peoples, the use of spells, incantations, and rites as causes to bring about desired effects (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 233-234). Maritain believes such a confusion occurred because the imagination played the primary role in the primitive’s experience of reality as opposed to the intelligence (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 229).

Thus, Maritain influenced Percy’s understanding of “magic,” as well as how words come to contain things *in alio esse*. All throughout his essay “Sign and Symbol,” Maritain stresses the utmost respect for primitive man, emphasizing that our intelligence does not differ in “nature”

but rather in “state” from the primitive (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 236-237, 252). In primitive cultures, the signified becomes totally and absolutely interpenetrated with the sign on the physical level (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 232).

Maritain writes,

In the formal-objective order the sign is thus something most astonishing, whereat the routine of culture alone prevents our wonder. And this marvelous function of containing the object—with respect to the mind—of having present in itself the thing itself *in alio esse*, is fully exercised in primitive man. Words are not anemic or colorless, they are overflowing with life—with their life as signs—for primitive man. (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 232)

And yet, the glory of such a lived participation in existence belies a danger (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 232). The primitive does not readily distinguish between sign and signified; rather, these two become one, “a physical interchangeability, a physical fusion, and a physical equivalence....” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 232).

Magic appears when the imagination usurps the proper “function of the sign,” and “formal causality” becomes “denatured by the imagination” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 235, 251). Above all, magic signs operate as “practical signs,” which signify “an intention and a direction of the practical intellect” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 224). Maritain acknowledges the dangers of magic signs, while admitting that “poetic thought,” “poetic creation,” and works of art imply “a kind of magical sign” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 252-253).

Thus, the imagination plays a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge, which children, primitives, and poets all bear witness to. Aristotle and Aquinas agreed that, without the

imagination, knowledge is not possible (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96). In *De Anima*, Aristotle writes, “The soul never thinks without an image” (Aristotle *De Anima* 431a15-20). Aristotle does not mean that humans know images themselves. Rather, humans know by means of images (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.Q85.a2). Commenting on Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Aquinas writes, “In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms [images]” (Aquinas, *Summa* I.Q84.a7). Phantasms reside in the imagination, and the intellect abstracts forms from these phantasms (Adler, *Aristotle for Everybody* 134). Idealism has no place in this realist epistemology because the intellect thinks the immaterial thing itself *in alio esse* with the help of the phantasm (Aristotle, *De Anima* 431b5; Aquinas, *Summa* I.Q85.a1). Frederick Wilhelmsen, whom Percy relies upon in *Symbol & Existence*, writes, “The philosopher must go through the phantasm to reach being” (Wilhelmsen 40; Wilhelmsen as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96). Wilhelmsen continues,

To say this is to say, in effect, that being is usually approached indirectly. We do not, as a matter of fact, directly plunge into an intuition of metaphysical truth simply by being confronted with an existing reality. We sidle up to being, as it were, and approach the terrain of metaphysics by way of a long ride through back country trails. (Wilhelmsen 40)

Poetically speaking, these “back country trails” are paved with symbols. Wilhelmsen understood a symbol as “a phantasm intending or representing intelligibility” (Wilhelmsen 40n3). For Maritain, a phantasm functions as a “formal sign,” not “*that which* is known” but rather “the means by which” we know something (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 223). And yet, despite his appreciation of both Wilhelmsen and Maritain, Percy appears to have considered the symbol as distinct from but related to the phantasm (Percy, *The Message* 263;

Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96, 185). While other scholastics and Thomists might focus on the phantasm as a mental entity, Percy wanted to investigate the symbol in its sensuous, empirical existence. While “formal signs” contain their objects *in alio esse*, in an intentional mode of existence, so do sensuous symbols, Percy argued (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 185). Recalling the earlier discussion of intentionality in the section on Cassirer and Langer, like Maritain’s “formal sign,” the sensible symbol itself “disappears” and allows the object intended to appear (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). Altogether, humans conceive the world by means of phantasms, concepts, and symbols, which mediate all existing intelligible forms.<sup>14</sup> Knowledge knows no other route.

In the end, call Percy what you will but do not call him a rationalist. In the primitive just as in modern man, the symbolic imagination takes its place not as a “crutch” in the act of knowing but as “the very soul and life of the human way of knowing” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96). The symbol, which enters the imagination laden with form, makes both truth and error possible (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96). As with all things, moderation is key. The imagination must not usurp the dominion of the intellect any more than the intellect can bypass the imagination in seeking direct contact with reality. Throughout *Symbol & Existence*, Percy makes clear that humans do not have direct knowledge of essences. Rather, humans know

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<sup>14</sup> At least one question in particular emerges from this paragraph: “Is every phantasm necessarily symbolic?” Wilhelmsen does not appear to think so. Wilhelmsen writes, “Existence is attained immediately in the judgment; but judgments necessarily entail the use of phantasms, and, *except in direct judgments of existing material things*, the phantasms employed are symbolic” (Wilhelmsen 40; Wilhelmsen as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 96; emphasis mine). Thus, whereas the large majority of phantasms may be symbolic, the “direct judgments of existing material things” do not appear to require symbols to know them. In other words, standing before a cup, Wilhelmsen might suggest that I do not need a symbol of that cup to know it. My intellect can abstract the form from the phantasm delivered by way of my senses. Percy appears to suggest otherwise, arguing that symbolization involves the application of one sensuous thing to another, not the application of a phantasm to an existing thing (Percy, *The Message* 263). Even in the presence of a cup, a child cannot know what it *is* until someone else names it for them and calls it a “cup” (Percy, *The Message* 42-44).

through the mediation of something else: the sensible symbol. Contemporary man faces two temptations, then: the return to a primitive mindset governed by the rule of the imagination alone and the equally deleterious prospect of a mindset with no imagination whatsoever (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 126-127; Langer, *Philosophy* 290-294). The latter of these temptations, what Maritain called “angelism,” afflicts all epistemologists, whether scientific or artistic, who try to acquire knowledge without the mediation of sensible symbols or phantasms (Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes* 183). Angelic intelligences do not require the mediation of sensible things, symbols or phantasms. As Maritain remarked concerning Descartes’ “angelic self”: “Its substance is the very act of thinking” (Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes* 183). In his critique of the Catholic art of his time, the literary critic Allen Tate explains that even the Catholic artist has fallen prey to abstract modes of thought, forsaking the concrete for the angelic (Tate, “The Symbolic Imagination” 261-262). Percy, who had read Tate’s essay, would have realized the implications of Tate’s insight. Indeed, Percy’s novels seek to convey the intelligibility of existence through the mediation of sensible symbols.

Up to this point, I have said nothing about that curious sign, the “reverse sign,” which reveals something about its user. I have tried to stress the role of the formal sign and the symbol in making an object known to the intellect—in Helen Keller, children, primitives, all people acquiring language. Maritain writes, “But even in normal thought the signs of which a man makes use to signify things (direct signs) also signify him (reverse signs)” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 254). Direct signs indicate objects, whereas reverse signs reveal the subject, or sign user (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 253). Contrasting his position with Freud’s, Maritain suggests that Freud considered all symbols in this “reverse” aspect (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 253). Psychology replaces

metaphysics when all symbols simply and *only* reflect the subjectivity of their users. Recall here the whole host of studies that link together the use of language, power, and subjectivity—letting go of the fact that symbols can in fact signify realities external to the self. Both “direct” and “reverse” symbols matter, of course. C1 consciousness deals in “direct” symbols, but C2 consciousness becomes curiously enrapt by symbols in their “reverse” function alone, seeking to get at the hidden core of the self behind the words. And yet, does such a hidden core really exist? And can the symbol formulate its essence? Such questions will have to remain for the following chapter to take up. For now it is enough to recall with both Percy and Maritain that the symbol can signify objects and the symbol user, too. Symbols can reveal something about the inner life, the subjectivity, of a person (Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* 128; Percy, “Symbol as Need” 383). Christ Himself put the matter quite directly when he said: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Lk 6:45 DRA). Words carry within them the reality of a living, breathing person, an immaterial soul. Is it any wonder, then, that incongruities between speech and action, between saying and doing, activate our moral sense? For when people say that which is not true, their “direct signs” emphatically become “reverse signs.” Liars attempt to make known that which is not the case and, in the process, make themselves into what they are not by saying what is not. Their speech betrays their corruption, if only indirectly. Before moving onto a discussion of how symbols can make us liars, the epitomes of C2 consciousness, I offer some implications from this chapter for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.



### *Implications for Rhetoric, Philosophy of Communication, and Media Ecology*

In this section, I briefly build out some implications of the aforementioned discussion for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology. First, I begin with implications for rhetoric. As mentioned in the first chapter, scholars of rhetoric considered Percy's ideas about metaphor (e.g., Campbell; Caraher; Cleary; Engnell; Lessl; Osborn and Ehninger). However, if scholars of rhetoric returned to Percy's ideas as expressed here, in the least the rhetorical canon of invention might return to realist roots. The etymological root of "invention" is the Latin *invenire*, which means "to find" or "to discover" (Gilson, *Methodical Realism* 97; "Invention"). In addition to commonplaces, where might rhetoricians look to find or discover arguments? "Existence," Percy might respond. Thus, I emphasize here the importance of moving from things to thought as opposed to moving from thought to things during rhetorical invention. As Percy has shown through his critique of Cassirer's work, humans do more than simply impose symbols upon an unknowable reality; rather, symbol and existence mutually interpenetrate in the moment of articulation. Further, I explain how rhetoricians might use Langer's and Percy's insights into analogy to invent compelling metaphors that discover existence. Second, I offer a reflection on analogy important to both philosophy of communication and media ecology. As mentioned in the first chapter, Anton thought that Percy's philosophy of communication failed to account for alphabetic literacy in his account of denotative utterance (Anton, "On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication" 84). Yet, the aforementioned discussion on the role of analogy in symbolic transformation makes clear that Percy did have a sense for how both spoken and written words serve as media of communication. Third, I relate how Percy's ideas on analogy compare with those put forward by Marshall McLuhan, another media ecologist informed by the Catholic

intellectual tradition whose understanding of analogy shaped his own epistemological presuppositions.

To begin, the aforementioned discussion of how symbolic transformation occurs yields practical insight into the art of symbolic mediation, which teachers and students of rhetoric should appreciate. Humans do not merely impose *a priori* symbols onto existence. The art of symbolic mediation, of naming appropriately, demands a consideration of existence. Take, for example, the problem of naming a new business. Suppose that I want to start a used bookstore. I could begin by thinking about the right name for the business and cycle through a logical list of names to impose on the reality that I want to create. Such an approach treats the name, whether consciously or not, as a quasi-magical, efficient cause. Through the name, I attempt to bring a new reality into existence. But suppose that instead of beginning with a name, I focus my attention on capturing some aspect of existence to represent (or re-present) my business. If I want to name a bookstore, I want to somehow capture the reality of reading good books, the thrill of discovering another's ideas, the smell of the pages and the feel of the covers, quiet mornings and the taste of coffee. I want to somehow translate this real experience of reading good books into a name, a sensuous "word-thing" that I can then share with others (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 227). I begin with reality instead of thought, with things instead of words (Gilson, *Methodical Realism* 84-92, 94-95). In the act of predication, the word and thing interpenetrate (Ong, *The Presence of the Word* 151-159; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 162-163). Importantly and above all, I begin the naming process by looking first to the world beyond my head (Crawford). True art, art that tells the truth, discovers the forms in things, not the forms of thought (Maritain, *Art & Scholasticism* 58-59, 65, 97n4-98n4, 128, 171-173; Percy, *Signposts* 140). As another example, consider the monumental task of naming a child (cf. Percy, *Lost* 237, 249). More recently,

historically speaking, many parents begin this naming process by starting with the name, especially the novel name, to see what sticks. Like the idealist, these parents attempt to go from thought to things (Gilson, *Methodical Realism* 84-92, 94-95). Parents place emphasis on picking a name that will allow their son or daughter to be a true individual, completely unlike the others. Contrast this approach to naming with an older approach that would look to tradition for examples of virtuous ancestors (e.g., saints). Certain proper names undoubtedly appear stronger than others, but only because those who bore these names in the past really and truly embodied desirable characteristics. These latter parents begin with reality, real people, and then search for a name to represent that reality.

As realists, good rhetoricians and poets begin with existence and use analogical metaphors to convey meaning. Percy reveals why logicians and surrealists alike make for bad rhetoricians and poets. Logicians stress univocity, whereas surrealists emphasize equivocity. In his essay "Metaphor as Mistake," Percy discusses what makes for a good metaphor. Percy tells a story about a time when he went hunting as a boy with his father and an African American guide. Percy writes, "At the edge of some woods we saw a wonderful bird. He flew as straight and swift as an arrow, then all of a sudden folded his wings and dropped like a stone into the woods" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). Percy asked the guide what the bird *was*. The guide replied that the bird was a "Blue Dollar Hawk" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). Later, Percy's father offered a correction and stated that the bird was actually a "Blue Darter Hawk" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). Percy writes, "I can still remember my disappointment at the correction" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 109). The correction disappointed the young Percy because "Blue Darter" was too univocally alike that which it modified (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 212). In like manner, bad poets call clouds "fleecy" or "white." Percy writes, "You have told me nothing. Fleecy

cloud, leg of a table, are tautologies, a regurgitation of something long since digested” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 221). Having identified that univocal metaphors do not reveal anything new, some go to the opposite extreme and stress equivocality. Percy equates the equivocal with the obscure and ambiguous (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 216-217). The surrealists often attempted to yield meaning through bizarre associations (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 217). A surrealist poet might associate a rifle with a stick of gum or a Billy goat with earwax. None of these associations readily make sense. The symbol and thing represented are too equivocal, too unlike, and too ambiguous (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 87). The paintings of Salvador Dalí exemplify the wholly strange tactics that the surrealists employed. Why is this clock melting? Why does this elephant have such long legs? The surrealist might get away with their exercise in equivocality for a period of time; after a while, however, Percy writes, “[T]he jig is up” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 217). The surrealist poet relies upon the “stored up energies of words” to achieve their effects (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 217). Yet, if the poet does not know what he or she means, or if the audience does not think that the poet knows what he or she means, then intersubjective communion cannot succeed (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 217).

Thus, good metaphors involve “unlike-but-analogous” symbols (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 84, 120). Analogical metaphors reveal something about existence. But why? Because analogies inhere in the things themselves. As Langer herself suggested, true propositions express real relations (Langer, *Philosophy* 68). Consider for a moment the example of classical music. Romantic theories of inspiration notwithstanding, Bach did not invent or create music *ex nihilo* but rather discovered scales and melodies in reality. Real proportions hold between notes on a scale. The third and the fifth note do in fact relate to the root note in a pleasing, harmonious way. On this point, Percy cites Allen Tate who wrote, “Nature offers the symbolic poet clearly

denotable objects in depth and in the round, which yield the analogies to higher syntheses” (Tate, “The Symbolic Imagination” 262; Tate as qtd. in Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 206). The mind delights in analogies because, through analogy, humans discover new facets of existence (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 85, 222). In the opening passage of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes, “All men by nature desire to know” (Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 980a). Analogies consummate this desire to know, which amounts to nothing less than a desire for contact with reality itself (Weil 250-251).

In addition to rhetoric, the preceding discussion on analogy opens up new ways to appreciate the implications of Percy’s work for philosophy of communication and media ecology. Recalling the influence of Langer on Percy, especially in terms of analogy, allows us to revisit Anton’s contention that Percy did not adequately account for alphabetic literacy in his philosophy of denotation (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication” 84). In Anton’s defense, Percy does not offer an extended meditation on the alphabet in *Symbolic & Existence*. Furthermore, Anton did not likely have access to Percy’s *Symbol & Existence* when writing “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication.” Nevertheless, Percy’s insights into the nature of analogy and symbolic transformation in *Symbol & Existence* apply across different media. Media ecologists, especially Havelock and Ong, have marveled at the extraordinary influence of the alphabet, the great translator from sound into sight, to shape perception and culture (Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write*; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*). Percy’s insights into the analogical nature of the symbol, however, reveal the inverse process experienced by all children learning to speak: the translation of sight (and the other senses) into sound. Near the end of *Symbol & Existence*, Percy describes the magic transformation of a word into a thing. If words in their usual usage intend objects in existence, then the poetic usage of words invites the

audience to marvel at the symbolic transformation itself, the transformation of a word into a thing (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 225-227). Percy writes,

What I see when the poet salvages the word from its utility context and holds it up for my gaze is the thing in the word in another mode of existence, *in alio esse*. I look *at* instead of *through* the miraculous transformation by which the poor naked vocable ‘becomes’ the thing, is intentionally transformed into the thing. What I perceive in all its intricate and iridescent reality is the thing itself as it has formed itself within the web of sound. (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 227)

The pleasure of the poet in his or her poetry reflects the primordial wonder evoked in children and primitives alike at the prospect of the thing itself packaged in a “web of sound.” At this point, Percy’s interest in the transformation of experience into one sense modality or another, a characteristic of technology, becomes clear. A good piece of communication technology is a good metaphor: It translates experience into one or more sense modalities (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 88-89). In this case, the spoken word offers itself as an “unlike-but-analogous” symbol for re-presenting experience, including visual experience. The written word, in a similar manner, invites the re-presentation of oral-aural experience. Both spoken and written words undergo symbolic transformation, a subtle but important event analyzed by Percy.

With regard to media ecology, Percy’s work intersects with the work of Marshall McLuhan, an English scholar interested in media and the classical trivium. Instead of spelling out the many parallels between these two thinkers, including their common intellectual ground in Aquinas and I.A. Richards, I only want to briefly highlight their mutual interest in analogy. Like other media ecologists, McLuhan warned about the widespread effects of alphabetic literacy on consciousness. For McLuhan, thinkers over the centuries had confused syllogistic reasoning

“with rationality itself” (McLuhan and Parker 239). The alphabet imposes an implicit “grammar” on an entire culture that begins to confuse truth, knowledge, and rationality with the characteristics of the alphabetic medium itself. In other words, at least in the Western world, the visual and linear form of the alphabet shaped cultures in its image (McLuhan, *Understanding* 117-124). Over time, truth became almost exclusively associated with the visual sense (Ong, *The Presence* 73-74). Dialectic, too, with its emphasis on syllogistic reasoning, came to crowd out the other arts of rhetoric and grammar in the classical trivium (McLuhan and McLuhan 229-233). The syllogism, with its connecting middle term, followed from the visual stress unleashed by alphabetic literacy (McLuhan and McLuhan 19-20). But why did the alphabet cause such a massive shift in our understanding of rationality itself? Simply put, the alphabet repeatedly transformed sound (and all other senses, for that matter) into sight on an extraordinary scale. The other senses began to play second fiddle to sight after the advent of the alphabet.

Part of McLuhan’s project is to restore the “non-discursive” (i.e., non-syllogistic) forms of reasoning to their proper place, especially analogy, which his and Eric McLuhan’s famous “tetrad” is based on (McLuhan and McLuhan 224; McLuhan and Powers 3-4). Gilson, whom McLuhan and McLuhan cite in their *Laws of Media*, explains how the syllogism is a process of exposition rather than discovery (Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* 229; McLuhan and McLuhan 218). According to Gilson, Aristotle’s syllogism is powerless to explore the Book of Nature (Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* 230). Gilson argues, “The only method which can be at all fruitful in such a case is reasoning by analogy and especially the reasoning of proportion” (Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* 230). Following Vico, McLuhan’s rhetorical and grammatical metaphysics stresses discovery over exposition and thereby differs from other dialectical, rationalistic approaches to metaphysics (McLuhan “Introduction,” xvii-

xviii; Vico sec. 374-375). How does this relate to Percy? In the least, Percy was no dialectician, but he was a metaphysician. As noted above, the dialectician does not discover anything new because he or she deals in univocal predications. Percy likewise stresses that the symbol offers a non-discursive form of reasoning that nonetheless may convey real knowledge (Percy, “Symbol as Need” 384). Undoubtedly, Percy took a great interest in language, a linguistic, discursive form. But Percy also wrote novels that did not follow rigorous plot outlines but rather put characters in open-ended situations (Percy as qtd. in Holditch 17-19). Percy’s interest in analogy, non-discursive symbols that discover existence, and formal cause rank him among the great “grammarians” of the twentieth century. While McLuhan stated, “The medium is the message,” Percy might have suggested, “The symbol is the message”; the symbol is, in Langer’s terms, the “new key” (Langer, *Philosophy* Ch. 1). The resonances between Percy’s “symbol” and McLuhan’s “medium” deserve far more attention than I can devote here, but it is perhaps enough to suggest that both Percy and McLuhan took a keen interest in discovering existence on its own terms rather than imposing their own symbols upon it.

Indeed, there is no need to impose symbols upon existence. A reading of Alain de Lille’s poetic verse, which attests to the importance of analogy in the cognitive process and in creation, helps to explain why:

<i>Omnis mundi creatura</i>	All of the world a creature
<i>quasi liber &amp; pictura</i>	like a book and a picture
<i>nobis est &amp; speculum;</i>	and a mirror, it is for us;
<i>nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,</i>	our life, our death
<i>nostri status, nostrae sortis</i>	for us having been set, our lot
<i>fidele signaculum.</i>	a trustworthy sign.



(Lille as qtd. in E. McLuhan, “Francis Bacon’s Theory of Communication and Media”  
22; translation mine)

To scholars of old and those of a medieval mindset not tempted by modern angelism, the world itself stands as a *fidele signaculum*, a trustworthy sign filled with patterns and forms open to the discerning mind. Recognition of such patterns tempers the impulse for humanity to make and remake itself in its own image. Humans do not know existence directly but “*mediately*, through the very thing the world is made of” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236-237). Humans know through sensuous media: “the sensuous symbol, the sound, the gesture, the icon” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 236). Humans know existence through existence. C1 consciousness peers outward, bearing witness to and concelebrating the splendor of being with other selves, not having yet been lured by the seductions of the autonomous self.

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### Chapter 3: C2 Consciousness, The “Pit” of the Self

Have you ever listened to yourself on a video or audio recording and wondered why your recorded voice sounded so strange (Percy, *Lost in the Cosmos* 7)? Perhaps, you might even go so far as to suggest that the sound of your voice made you cringe. My recorded voice does, at least. But does your recorded voice sound like *you*? If not, why not? A standard scientific answer might suggest that your recorded voice sounds different because you usually hear your voice from both the inside and the outside rather than simply from the outside, as in a recording (Hullar). Physics and physiology seem to explain the matter in a relatively satisfactory way, no? It makes perfect sense that the vibrations from the inside—the rattling of the vocal cords, the trembling of the skull, the movements of the delicate mechanisms within the ear, etc.—change the perception of the sound. However, how do you account for the relative dissatisfaction that you experience when you hear your recorded voice? Is it simply because your recorded voice does not conform with your expectations of how you should sound (Jaekl)? Anyway, for that matter, *how should you sound*? Why does it make a difference whether you speak in a high-pitched voice or low-pitched voice? There must be some evolutionary explanation here (e.g., lower-pitched voices attract mates, threaten rivals, warn predators, etc.) to account for this, no? As it turns out, I suspect that my voice has something to do with my identity, who I think that I am, and how I conceive myself. And as I hope to show in this chapter, science can only take us so far in investigating this question of the self (not to mention the other and God). In this case, then, I need help not from a scientist, per se, but from someone interested in semiotics and existentialism: Walker Percy.

In the previous chapter, I discussed how C1 consciousness may symbolize everything except for the “self.” Symbols function as vehicles for the conception of objects and yield

knowledge of the real world. In this chapter, however, I seek to explore the dark side of symbol use. In C2 consciousness, symbols fail to mediate knowledge of existence. Passive, *a priori* symbolic constructions of the world dominate C2 consciousness (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 131). For C2 consciousness, the novelty and joy of naming have worn off. Furthermore, C2 consciousness faces the predicament of having to find an adequate symbol to construe the “self,” an impossible task. Thus, I first review some of the primary characteristics of C2 consciousness. Second, I discuss how certain ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel informed Percy’s understanding of C2 consciousness. Third, I dedicate a section to Heidegger’s influence on Percy’s thinking. Reviewing the thought of these existentialists will lead to a better appreciation of Percy’s resistance to scientism. The so-called objective, scientific worldview tends to conceal existence, especially one’s own subjective existence (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 7). Certain existentialists, on the other hand, sought to give existence and subjectivity their proper due (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 6-8). As the chapter comes to a close, I stress how C2 consciousness escapes its predicament through intersubjective communion with the other. Finally, like the previous chapter, I conclude with implications for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

### *C2 Consciousness and the “Pit” of the Self*

In this section, I begin by outlining some of the essential characteristics of C2 consciousness. Above all, C2 consciousness is self-consciousness. Just as C1 consciousness looks outward, having things other than itself as intentional objects, C2 consciousness peers inward in an attempt to construe itself “as” one thing or another. Remarkably, unlike everything else in the cosmos, C2 consciousness cannot formulate itself through the mediation of the

symbol. The unformulability (and unknowability) of the self to itself is its primary predicament. In ages past, C2 consciousness may have had recourse to narratives beyond the self to explain the self's place within the world. However, postmodernity affords no such security to C2 consciousness, which tries to escape its predicament through other means. In a postreligious, technological society, the self might identify itself with occupational positions, the myths of technics and state, or even consumer goods (Percy, *Lost* 20-26; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 126). Despair follows from not recognizing the predicament of the self and from the ultimate futility of these alternative means for informing the self. Those fortunate enough to realize their predicament and to seek help beyond themselves, on the other hand, enter C3 consciousness, which I will describe in the next chapter.

To begin, C2 consciousness has several characteristics that set it apart from C1 consciousness, including the inability to appreciate existence through the mediation of the symbol. If the joyful concelebration of existence with others characterizes C1 consciousness, then boredom, anxiety, shame, and alienation belong to C2 consciousness, a falling into the "pit" of the self (Percy, *Lost* 34-35, 70-72, 78, 108, 209-213). In Biblical terms, C2 consciousness corresponds with the Fall and expulsion from the "semiotic" Garden of Eden (Percy, *Lost* 106). If a four-year-old child exemplifies C1 consciousness, then a seven-year-old child exemplifies C2 consciousness. Why? Because seven-year-old children experience shame and radical self-consciousness in a manner completely foreign to four-year-old children (Ames et al. 38-39; Gesell and Ilg 320-321; Percy, *Lost* 107n-108n). Boredom ensues when everything already has a name (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 100). That is *just* a "dissertation," a "university," a "bed," a "desk," a "Doctor," etc. "Habitualization" strips away the magnificent particularity of existence and impedes thought (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105; Shklovsky 12). C2 consciousness

experiences a “thingification of all reality,” the “reification” of existence into “simulacra,” mere instances of things already known (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 104-105). Percy writes, “The very means by which we know are the same means by which we fall prey to ignorance” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105). Humans know through the mediation of symbols, but these same symbols can also obscure existence and prevent new insights from coming to light. As discussed in Chapter 1, sensible words become things *in alio esse* and mediate knowledge of existence; however, when the novelty of naming fades, paradoxically, things appear as mere instances of their respective symbols (Percy, *Lost* 104-105). Through “usage” and “familiarity,” a symbol may become a “semantic husk serving rather to conceal than to disclose what it designates” (Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* 206). In semiotic terms, the signifier comes to carry more ontological weight and appears more real than the signified (Percy, *Lost* 105). Since everything already has a name, anxiety follows when something truly strange appears that resists being construed “as” an instance of this thing or that thing previously known (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 101). For Percy, the only alien in the cosmos is the self who uses symbols, the true stranger and anxiety-inducing existent that resists symbolic formulation (Percy, *Lost* 164, 253). Percy writes, “The self perceives itself as naked. Every self is ashamed of itself” (Percy, *Lost* 108). Why? Because the self seeks relief in the shade of various symbols. The self, uncertain of how to place itself in the world, longs for a permanent “semiotic habiliment for itself” (Percy, *Lost* 108). But symbols offer no such enduring respite.

Thus, Percy does not think that it is possible to know one’s “self” through the mediation of the symbol (Percy, *Lost* 211n, 248). Percy’s stance on the unknowability of the self follows from his philosophy of communication and his religious sensibilities. Percy writes, “Semiotically, the self is literally unspeakable to itself. One cannot speak or hear a word which

signifies oneself, as one can speak or hear a word signifying anything else, e.g., *apple*, *Canada*, *7-Up*” (Percy, *Lost* 106-107). The unknowability of the self follows from its unspeakability. The self cannot render itself presentable, formulable, or “*darstellbar*” through the mediation of the symbol (Percy, *The Message* 283, 286; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 75).<sup>1</sup> Percy writes, “[T]he self is literally inconceivable—unlike a tree or a star or you, it cannot be conceived under the auspices of a symbol—and is referentially mobile” (Percy, *Lost* 211n-212n). By “referentially mobile,” Percy means that the self sucks in any possible symbolic materials in order to understand itself “as” something, in one way or another (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 106-109). Paradoxically, the self resists conceivability not because no symbol applies but because *all symbols may apply*. Percy writes, “[O]ne’s self exists for oneself on a semantic  $\alpha$  to —  $\alpha$  axis, the best and the worst, the blessed and the damned, and is capable of temporary fixation on any position on this axis” (Percy, *Lost* 212). When it comes to the self, the signified always remains as a leftover in the symbolic process. Percy writes, “For me, all signifiers fit me, one as well as another. I am rascal, hero, craven, brave, treacherous, loyal, at once the secret hero and asshole of the Cosmos” (Percy, *Lost* 107). Everything from personality tests to self-help books attest to the self’s attempt to place itself in the world “as” something: as a go-getter, as timid, as self-confident, as an INFJ-T personality type, etc. (“Introduction | Advocate (INFJ) Personality | 16Personalities”). In previous centuries, the self might identify “as” an animal (in a totemistic sense), “as” Nature (in a pantheistic sense), or even “as” under God (in a Judeo-Christian sense) (Percy, *Lost* 109-112). In the current historical moment, however, conventional wisdom may invite you to invent yourself “as” whatever you like, to embark on a *causa sui*, or self-caused, project (Anton, *Sources of Significance* 19-28; Becker, *The Denial of Death*). Percy illustrates

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<sup>1</sup> The Freudian term “*darstellbar*” appears in Langer’s *Feeling and Form*, which Percy references in *Symbol & Existence* (Langer, *Feeling and Form* 241; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 75).

how the self may identify with many different, even contradictory, symbols in *Lost in the Cosmos*. For example, Percy begins *Lost in the Cosmos* with a satirical critique of astrology. Percy invites you, the reader, to imagine reading a horoscope for your particular astrological sign (e.g., Cancer, Gemini, Taurus, etc.). As you read, imagine that you identify with what the horoscope has to say about you. “Hm, you say, quite true. I’m like that” (Percy, *Lost* 6). However, later you realize that you had read the wrong horoscope, one for a different astrological sign. You go on to read the horoscope for your actual astrological sign, but this horoscope, too, seems to describe you (Percy, *Lost* 5-6). Why, Percy asks, do people consider both the first and the second horoscope as accurately describing themselves (Percy, *Lost* 6)? The reason lies in the referential mobility of the self and its capacity to function like a “vacuole,” an “amoeba,” or a “nought,” which desperately tries to place itself in the world “as” something and inform the “pit” of its own nothingness (Percy, *Lost* 20-26, 210). Ultimately, to know yourself through symbolic mediation like everything else in the cosmos would mean knowing what you *are*. Thus, C2 consciousness faces the predicament of finding an adequate symbol for itself in a world already populated with symbols.

The term “predicament” frequently turns up across Percy’s writings. Percy writes, “The motto of the symbolic (and existential) predicament is: This is a chair for you and me, that is a tree, everything is something, you are what you are, but *what am I?*” (Percy, *The Message* 284). Every individual self must answer this question: “[B]ut *what am I?*” The sciences may attempt to get a grasp on the nature of the human self and answer this question. Indeed, the sciences may catalogue a list of needs that each and every self must have satisfied, such as food, water, sex, companionship, interpersonal relationships, self-actualization, etc. Recall here Maslow and his hierarchy of needs (Arnett and Arneson Ch. 6). But the predicament of a human being in a world

is not the same as the predicament of an animal in an environment. Even after having satisfied all the various needs delineated by modern science, the self may still experience “dislocation” (Percy *Lost* 80-82, 122; Percy, *The Message* 111). The sciences cannot speak to an individual’s predicament because the sciences understand particulars in terms of general theories or laws (Percy, *The Message* 22; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 7). Those who abstract themselves from their concrete circumstances in the name of “objectivity” (e.g., “the scientist”) fail to recognize their predicament, perhaps the direst situation of all (Percy, *The Message* 111, 130). Thus, C2 consciousness finds itself in a predicament, not knowing who or what it is, which it may or may not recognize (Percy, *Lost* 215). Related to this point, a passage from Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*, which appears as the opening epigraph to Percy’s *The Moviegoer*, reads: “... [T]he specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair.”<sup>2</sup> Percy writes, “The worst of all despairs is to imagine one is at home when one is really homeless” (Percy, *The Message* 144). A castaway should recognize his or her “grave predicament” and “not pretend to be at home on the island” (Percy, *The Message* 144). Following Kierkegaard, Percy suggests that only those who recognize their despair can hope (Percy, *The Message* 115). On the other hand, content consumers who amuse and distract themselves with endless rounds of entertainment cannot hope (Percy, *The Message* 115; Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*). Without knowing their predicament, or their inability to understand their place in the cosmos, C2 consciousnesses cannot seek a remedy (Percy, *Lost* 215). Percy defines a “consumer” as precisely that sort of passive entity in a highly technological society who consumes experiences without pausing to question his or her very existence (Percy, *The Message* 61, 115). A traveler

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<sup>2</sup> The 1946 edition of Walter Lowrie’s translation of *The Sickness Unto Death* appears in Percy’s library at UNC Chapel Hill. In the 1941 edition, this passage reads: “[T]he specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unconscious of being despair” (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* 71).

unaware that she has lost her bearings will not strive to put herself back on course. The modern self, or C2 consciousness, does not know that he or she is truly lost in the cosmos (Percy, *Lost*). If C2 consciousnesses knew their predicament, they might await “news from across the seas,” a message in a bottle, a sign of deliverance (Percy, *The Message* 139-149; see also Percy, *The Message* 119-149). In order to return home, C2 consciousnesses must begin to read the signs and symbols along the way without falling prey to idolatry—the worship and adoration of something on the merely immanent plane (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 118).

Despite the inability to know itself through the mediation of the symbol, C2 consciousness nevertheless strives to do so. Indeed, C2 consciousness may adopt a consumptive orientation toward the symbols of technics and state. In *Symbol & Existence*, Percy explains how an individual in a technical society can thoroughly identify with his profession (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 127-129). For example, someone who has become a medical doctor has undergone a type of transformation and “has participated in another identity” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 128). After graduating from medical school, a “roentgenologist,” or a specialist in radiology, may seem to possess magical powers, such as the ability to cure a patient by making “a scientific pass with his paraphernalia and his ray” (Percy, *The Message* 206). The self may attempt to find a “permanent semiotic habiliment for itself—often by identifying itself with other creatures in its world” (Percy, *Lost* 108). In primitive tribes, this attempt may have taken the form of totemism, the identification of the self with something in the surrounding milieu, such as an animal, whereas in the contemporary world it appears as role-modeling, the identification of the self with an exemplary individual or professional (Percy, *Lost* 109).<sup>3</sup> Complete participation in a technical

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<sup>3</sup> Compare the primitive who says “I am a parakeet” with the modern autonomous self who says “I am a doctor.” Both the primitive’s utterance and the autonomous self’s utterance rely upon a coupling of the self with some other immanent entity within the cosmos (parakeet, doctor, etc.) (Percy, *Lost* 110-111; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 128). The symbol makes such an ontological coupling possible.



identity may blind the self from knowing the true nature of its predicament and the ultimate incapacity of that technical identity to fulfill its deepest desires (e.g., an answer to the question of its existence, etc.). Beyond identification with technical identities, the autonomous self, not believing in anything beyond its “self,” can fall prey to and identify with the myths of the state (Percy, *Lost* 157, 189-191; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 126-217). Totalitarian states in the twentieth century provided all-encompassing worldviews that clearly delineated the place of the self in society. Whatever he or she may have had, the Nazi did not have an identity crisis. The heinous Nazi narrative provided a symbolic reservoir that individuals could draw upon to alleviate the anxiety of their predicament, much to the detriment of others.

Beyond the myths of technics and state, C2 consciousness may attempt to remedy its semiotic predicament by consuming goods, too. The desire to have a particular consumer good may easily become idolatrous: “If I can have that car, my life will be different, for my nothingness will be informed by the having of it” (Percy, *The Message* 284). Percy writes, “The proper conjuration of technical man is not Tiger! Tiger! But Jaguar! Jaguar!” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 126). For Percy, the totemism of primitive tribes has much in common with consumption in a technical society. The modern, immanent consumer may identify with his new car like a primitive may have identified with a particular animal in the world. Both the primitive and the modern consumer operate on an “immanent” plane (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 124, 129, 133). As Percy has noted, Levy-Brühl explained how the primitives that he studied did not have an awareness of the supernatural or the transcendent (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 122). In like manner, the modern consumer lives in the immanent realm of sheer human “fulfillment” (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 18-20, 142-145, 623). Ironically, the attempt to inform one’s own nothingness through the consumption of goods only ends up emptying those same goods of their significance

(Percy, *The Message* 284). Percy explains, “[W]hat paradoxically characterizes the zone of having is the progressive annihilation of forms, an emptying out and a rendering nought by the very act of having” (Percy, *The Message* 284). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy reviews the “emptying out” of various consumer goods and experiences, including antiques, fashionable clothing, and travel (Percy, *Lost* 20-26, 183). Yet, like participation in a technical identity or the myths of the state, such immanent consumption also fails to inform the self (Percy, *The Message* 284).

Before transitioning into the next section, I would like to give two caveats that apply to Percy’s hypothesis on the unknowability and unspeakability of the self. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, “reverse signs” can reveal something about one’s inner life, a particular aspect of the self. For example, someone looking to advance in the spiritual life must know her dominant faults and weaknesses. Individuals have particular habits and dispositions built up over time that make them more or less likely to act virtuously (Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a-1103b). However, even knowing one’s habits and dispositions calls for the presence of another. Others can recognize particular blind spots in your character that you may fail to notice. Second, Percy does believe that symbols can reveal something about another. Percy writes, “You are *Ralph* to me and I am *Walker* to you, but you are not *Ralph* to you and I am not *Walker* to me” (Percy, *Lost* 107). Symbols allow us to size each other up and to know at least some aspects about each other, to know each other “as” friendly, offensive, kind, generous, mean, nice, dogmatic, open-minded, etc. (Percy, *Lost* 7-8). Martin Buber, whom Percy cites, might describe this sort of sizing up as a degeneration from an “I-Thou” relation to an “I-It” relation (Buber, *I and Thou*; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 164). Percy, of course, recognized the dangers of relating to others in this manner. A doctor may see her patient merely “as” an instance of a certain

disease; a “reification” occurs wherein the patient disappears, and the disease comes to the forefront of the doctor’s attention (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 103-104).<sup>4</sup> In other words, the theory of the disease comes to take on a higher degree of reality than the existent person standing before the doctor. The great physician, according to Percy, can focus on both the disease and the patient in his or her unique particularity (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 104).<sup>5</sup> Percy writes, “What is almost impossible of human achievement is to see something strange as what it is in itself” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 100). In lieu of allowing something truly novel to appear, the symbol will work to construe the other “as” one thing or another. To do otherwise would result in an intolerable anxiety, an inability to place the other in the world (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 101, 195-196). Thus, while recognizing the capacity of the symbol to yield knowledge, Percy’s philosophy of communication remains attuned to the mystery of the other. The other’s gaze, especially, escapes symbolization and stands over against the self: “It [the other’s gaze] is not formulable. In the exchange of stares, everything is at stake” (Percy, *The Message* 285). The other’s gaze may reveal to the self its own unformulability as well as the self’s dependence on the other for a world (Percy, *Lost* 101; Percy, *The Message* 285-286).

Thus, in this section I have reviewed some basic characteristics of C2 consciousness. I began by describing how C2 consciousness ceases to encounter existence and instead encounters symbols and representations (Percy, “Loss of the Creature”). Boredom follows from everything already having a name. No longer content to name things in the world, C2 consciousness turns

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred North Whitehead’s “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” relates to the problem of reification (Whitehead 51-59). Whitehead’s “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” refers to “mistaking the abstract for the concrete” (Whitehead 51). Percy writes, “It [the ‘fallacy of misplaced concreteness’] is the mistaking of an idea, a principle, an abstraction, for the real. As a consequence of the shift, the ‘specimen’ is seen as less real than the theory of the specimen” (Percy, *The Message* 58).

<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that not only the doctor but also the patient runs the risk of giving the disease more reality than it deserves, identifying with their disease and letting it obscure their very own existence (Elliott, “A New Way to Be Mad”; Percy, *The Message* 185).

attention toward formulating the self through symbolic means. In Percy's and our historical moment, these symbolic means include the myths of technics and state as well as consumption. In the next section, I will uncover some influences behind Percy's understanding of the self as "nought" as well as the formulation of "simulacra": Jean-Paul Sartre and Gabriel Marcel. If the previous chapter revealed the merits of science by arguing for a realist epistemology, then this chapter, and especially the next two sections, seeks to give the existentialists their due for recognizing the importance of subjective existence. Among other things, the existentialists described the predicament faced by the self with no name for itself. In order to support his position about the unspeakability of the self, Percy used the phenomenological descriptions of Sartre and Marcel, which I now turn to consider.

#### *Sartre and Marcel: From Self as "Nought" to Homo Viator*

In this section, I outline some existentialist influences behind Percy's understanding of C2 consciousness. In particular, I describe how the symbol can lead to a reification or hypostatization of the "self." In C1 consciousness, symbols mediate existence. In C2 consciousness, however, symbols conceal existence, especially the existence of the self. Thus, I will first review the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre on Percy. Despite their different religious presuppositions, both Sartre and Percy could agree upon the danger of psychological determinism, which strips away free will from the individual. Further, although Percy rejects Sartre's ontology of "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself," which I unpack below, Percy still drew upon Sartre's notion of the self "as" a "nothing" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 79). Percy also appreciates Sartre's account of "bad faith," or the reification of the self that occurs when the self attempts to grasp itself through symbolic means. When acting in "bad faith," the self

understands itself “as” any other thing in the world (e.g., as a waiter, as a soldier, etc.) (Percy, *Lost* 106; Sartre, *Being* 59). In reality, however, such reifications obscure the existence of the self and its freedom. In the final analysis, Percy accuses Sartre himself of “bad faith” because Sartre ironically reifies the self into a “nothing.” Moving beyond Sartre, I review Marcel’s influence on Percy, especially Marcel’s notions of the “simulacrum” and *homo viator*.

Ultimately, symbolic simulacra can cover over not only the mystery of the self but also the mystery of the other and God (cf. Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: I. Reflection & Mystery* 54).

Marcel describes *homo viator*, or man the traveler, as a creature oriented toward transcendence and contact with the Divine. This section traces out similarities as well as differences between Sartre and Marcel. The conversation here concerning the existentialists and the question of the self continues in the following section on Heidegger.

To begin, Percy both disagreed and agreed with certain ideas put forward by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a French existential phenomenologist and atheist. At first glance, Percy and Sartre may seem to have little in common. Percy committed himself to Catholicism, whereas Sartre held fast to atheism. In his systematic review of Sartre’s philosophy, Collins suggests that Sartre presupposes atheism from the onset of his philosophy (Collins Ch. 2). In other words, Collins understands Sartre’s account of “being in-itself” and the absurdity of existence as inextricably bound to Sartre’s “postulatory” atheism (Collins 46-47, 60, 87). Moreover, as a believing Catholic, Percy would have been obliged to believe in the goodness of creation, while Sartre saw “being-in-itself” as fundamentally chaotic, absurd, and irrational (Sartre, Introduction to *Being and Nothingness* lxvi).<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, despite their different religious presuppositions,

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<sup>6</sup> In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy hints at the awe-inspiring wonder of the cosmos (Percy, *Lost* 89). And, in the preface to *Symbol & Existence*, Percy extolls the beauty of practicing real science as opposed to scientism (Percy, Preface to *Symbol & Existence* 1-2).

Percy would have found much to agree with in Sartre's philosophy. In particular, Sartre takes issue with psychological determinism, which Sartre dismisses as an "attitude of excuse" (Sartre, *Being* 40). The individual who believes in psychological determinism attempts to flee from the "anguish" of freedom (Sartre, *Being* 28-40).<sup>7</sup> A dyadic, entirely immanent science (e.g., behaviorism) could explain away human freedom and thereby dispense an individual from taking responsibility for his or her actions. Thus, both Sartre and Percy rejected psychological determinism. Moreover, like Percy, Sartre aimed to describe the nature of human being. Sartre asks, "What must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come to being?" (Sartre, *Being* 24). Sartre suggests that man must be "freedom," which perpetually negates "being-in-itself" (Sartre, *Being* 24-25). An existentialist *par excellence*, Sartre placed existence before essence (Barrett 244; Sartre, *Being* 25). Instead of conceiving of man in terms of an essence, Sartre sought to understand man in terms of the "nothing."

Indeed, Sartre describes the self as a type of "nothing," or what Percy calls the "nought."<sup>8</sup> Understanding the self as "nought" requires a brief review of Sartre's ontological distinction between "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself." Sartre divided reality into "being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*)" and "being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*)" (Sartre, Intro to *Being* lxiii). Sartre describes "being-in-itself" with the following terms: "thing-like," "blind," "opaque," and "filled with itself" (Sartre, *Being* 73; Sartre, Intro to *Being* lxv-lxvi). Sartre writes, "Being is. Being is

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<sup>7</sup> For Sartre, "fear" differs from "anguish" insofar as the latter concerns human freedom (Sartre, *Being* 29). Sartre gives the example of someone walking along a precipice. This person might feel fear at what might happen to him (e.g., slipping on a rock), but he also might feel anguish at what he might do (e.g., throwing himself off the edge) (Sartre *Being* 29-30). Sartre writes, "Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over" (Sartre, *Being* 29). As it pertains to fear, Sartre writes, "...I am given to myself as a thing, I am passive in relation to these possibilities; they come to me from without; in so far as I am also an object in the world, subject to gravitation, they are my possibilities" (Sartre, *Being* 30). Fear relates to a dyadic universe, whereas anguish pertains to the properly human.

<sup>8</sup> So far as I can tell, the word "nought" does not appear in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. However, Percy seems to use the term "nought" as a synonym for Sartre's "nothing" in Hazel Barnes' translation of *Being and Nothingness*. Thus, I use "nought" and "nothing" synonymously here and elsewhere throughout this chapter.

in-itself. Being is what it is” (Sartre, Intro to *Being* lxvi). Nothing exists beyond being as it appears (Sartre, Intro to *Being* xlvi, xlviii, lxi). In Sartre’s novel *Nausea*, the main character, Roquentin, encounters the absurdity of “being-in-itself.” Roquentin describes the surrounding milieu and himself as “de trop,” or “superfluous” (Sartre as qtd. and translated by Barnes, see Barnes, Translator’s Introduction to *Being and Nothingness* xvi-xvii; Sartre, *La Nausée* 180-181; cf. Sartre, Intro to *Being* lxvi).<sup>9</sup> Roquentin states, “We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn’t the slightest reason to be here, none of us; each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt de trop [superfluous] in relation to the others” (Sartre as qtd. and translated by Barnes, see Barnes, Trans. Introduction to *Being* xvi-xvii).<sup>10</sup> In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre writes, “Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is *de trop* [superfluous] for eternity” (Sartre, Intro to *Being* lxvi). “Being-for-itself,” on the other hand, refers to human consciousness. For Sartre, human consciousness exists by negating “being-in-itself.” Human consciousness, or “being-for-itself,” can exist precisely by not being “being-in-itself” (Collins 62). Consciousness thus appears amidst “being-in-itself” as a “decompression of being” (Sartre, *Being* 74). Sartre writes, “Thus nothingness is this hole of being, this fall of the in-itself toward the self, the fall by which the for-itself is constituted” (Sartre, *Being* 79). Human consciousness emerges as a “nothing” within “being-in-itself” (Sartre, *Being* 79). As Sartre writes, “Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Flynn translates the French “de trop” as “excessive” (“Jean-Paul Sartre”).

<sup>10</sup> In her translator’s introduction to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Barnes explains how she translated this passage from Sartre’s *Nausea*, which includes the use of the phrase “de trop.” In making her translation, Barnes used Sartre’s (1938) *La Nausée* in addition to another English translation of the novel by Lloyd Alexander. Barnes writes, “I have used with some changes the English translation [of *Nausea*] by Lloyd Alexander: *Nausea*. London: New Directions. 1949” (Barnes, Trans. Introduction to *Being* xvi n.7). In the 1964 New Directions Paperback edition of Sartre’s *Nausea* translated by Lloyd Alexander, this passage reads, “We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn’t the slightest reason to be there, none of us, each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt in the way in relation to the others” (Sartre, *Nausea* [trans. Lloyd Alexander] 128). Note that the phrase “de trop” does not appear here. Nevertheless, Sartre himself uses the phrase “de trop” in *La Nausée*, which Barnes simply leaves untranslated in her translation (Sartre, *La Nausée* 180-181).

being—like a worm” (Sartre, *Being* 21). Collins, who Percy used as an entrance into the work of the existentialists, does a fine job unpacking the oftentimes difficult terminology that Sartre employs. Collins explains,

It is only by *not being* the being of the In-itself that consciousness can give rise to the world we experience. This process of ‘nothing-ing’ is required because of the nature of being in-itself. The latter is a dense, viscous, cohesive mass which enjoys the self-identity of opaque and sunless matter. (Collins 62)

Here, Collins use of the term “nothing-ing” captures the ongoing process whereby consciousness, or “being-for-itself,” emerges within the darkness of “being-in-itself.” Sartre considers “being-for-itself” as the “nihilation” of “being-in-itself” (Sartre, *Being* 96, 617-618). Like “nothing-ing,” the term “nihilation” implies the perpetual negating of “being-in-itself” by “being-for-itself.” Of course, human experience involves both “being-in-itself” and “being-for-itself,” being and nothingness; though the body exists as the seat of consciousness, it nevertheless may be treated like an object or thing (Barnes, Trans. Introduction to *Being* xviii; Sartre, *Being* 262, 288, 302). Despite rejecting Sartre’s ontology, Percy still appreciated Sartre’s phenomenological description of the “deterioration” that occurs when C1 consciousness falls into C2 consciousness (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). Percy writes, “Sartre’s dichotomy of being, the being-for-itself, the Nought, the *passion inutile*, and the Being-in-itself, the sodden passivity of things, is thus not really an ontology but a masterly analysis of a term of deterioration” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). In other words, for Percy, Sartre’s phenomenological description of “being-for-itself” amidst “being-in-itself” adequately captures what happens when the symbol fails to mediate existence. Elsewhere, Percy states, “I exist as a nought in the center of the picture-book world of the *en soi*” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 194).



The self encounters a “picture-book world” because everything has already been named by “them” (Percy, *Lost* 119). Provided that the self exists as a “nought,” trouble ensues when the self tries to conceive itself “as” something like anything else in the world (or, “as” the “they” would have it), which results in “bad faith” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 164; Percy, *Lost* 119-124; Percy, *The Message* 54).

Like Sartre’s notion of the self as a “nothing,” Percy appreciated Sartre’s description of “bad faith.” People act in “bad faith” when they attempt to escape their predicament by treating themselves like any other thing in the world (Sartre, *Being* 44, 47-70). Acting in “bad faith” means fleeing from “anguish,” or the responsibility that freedom imposes on being human (Sartre, *Being* 44). Those who act in “bad faith” attempt to merge themselves with “being-in-itself” by becoming “thing-like” (Sartre, *Being* 60, 64-65, 73). Sartre gives the example of a waiter who plays at “being a waiter in a café” (Sartre, *Being* 59). The waiter carries the tray, makes gestures, and attends to patrons in such a way that betrays his role-playing (Sartre, *Being* 59). Sartre writes, “We need not watch long before we can explain it: he [the waiter] is playing at *being* a waiter in a café” (Sartre, *Being* 59). The waiter pretends *to be* a waiter. The waiter takes his place in a world of meaning as a thing among other things, a name among other names. As another example, Sartre describes a soldier who stands at attention and “makes himself into a solider-thing” (Sartre, *Being* 59). The expectations of others would seem to necessitate acting in “bad faith” (Sartre, *Being* 59). How strange it would be for a waiter to abandon his role, curse out the customers, and begin dancing on a table! Yet, such a possibility always exists. The waiter could choose to not come into work the next day (Sartre, *Being* 60). The soldier could vacate his post. Sartre writes, “The goal of bad faith, as we said, is to put oneself out of reach; it is an escape” (Sartre, *Being* 65). In short, “bad faith” means hypostatizing one’s essence and

eschewing freedom. People engage in “bad faith” to assuage the anxiety that follows from the unspeakability of the self and, as Percy might suggest, when trying to find a permanent semiotic habiliment (Percy, *Lost* 106-109; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 101, 195-196). Consider here the difference between wanting *to be* a writer and the oftentimes grueling, humiliating, and painful process of writing good prose. The person who seeks the former without doing the work of the latter falls prey to “bad faith” and idolatry, a symbolic construction lacking existential ground. Percy writes, “Sartre’s various descriptions of bad faith in role-playing are marvelous phenomenological renderings of this quest of the self for some, any, kind of habiliment” (Percy, *Signposts in a Strange Land* 390). Despite Sartre’s descriptions of others’ “bad faith,” however, Percy claims that Sartre, too, engaged in “bad faith.” Percy thinks that Sartre himself succumbs to “bad faith” by describing the self as “nothing” (Percy, *The Message* 286). Ironically, by labeling the inconceivable self as “nothing,” Sartre still identifies it as something. Thus, Percy accuses Sartre of “hypostatizing the unformulability of [the] self” (Percy, *The Message* 286). Percy finds clear evidence of Sartre’s hypocrisy in Sartre’s novel *The Reprieve*, in which the main character discovers that nothing lies within himself (Sartre, *The Reprieve* 280). Percy writes,

The telltale sign is his [Matthieu, one Sartre’s characters] elation, his sense of having at last discovered his identity. He is something after all—Nothing! And in so doing, is he not committing the same impersonation which Sartre so severely condemns in others? If the structure of consciousness is intentional, to be of its essence directed toward the other, as being-towards, then the ontologizing of this self-unformulability as Nought is as perverse as any other impersonation—really a kind of inferior totemism. (Percy, *The Message* 286)

Here, Percy underscores the other directedness of consciousness, which will become more important in discussions below concerning authenticity and the importance of intersubjectivity to Percy. For now, it is perhaps enough to suggest that the self cannot escape its predicament by identifying itself as a “nothing,” which, ironically, makes the self into a something. Instead of settling on the notion of self as “nought,” Percy turned instead to Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), the Catholic philosopher and playwright, to further draw out how symbols may conceal the existence of the self, the other, and God in C2 consciousness.

Sartre’s philosophy and Marcel’s philosophy had much in common; though, Marcel took issue with Sartre’s immanentism, materialism, and atheism. Like Sartre’s notion of the self as “nothing,” Marcel thought of the self as a type of “wound,” an “empty void,” a “vulnerable” and “*highly sensitive enclosure*” (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 16; Percy, *Message* 283-284;). According to Marcel, the self always turns to the other for its “final investiture” and confirmation (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 16; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 19). Marcel writes, “I can affirm nothing about myself which would be really myself; nothing, either, which would be permanent; nothing which would be secure against criticism and the passage of time” (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 16). The self that exists in time remains incomplete and capable of change. No reification of the self “as” one thing or another can last forever. Percy acknowledges the affinity between Sartre and Marcel regarding the self’s unformulability. As Percy writes, “That which symbolizes remains at the center of things as a gaping hole among forms: the aching wound of self (Marcel), the Nought (Sartre)” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). Both Sartre and Marcel seemed to have intuited something about the semiotic, existential predicament of the self. Yet, Sartre and Marcel differ in many important respects, too. In *Homo Viator*, Marcel provides a direct reply to Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. Marcel begins by admitting the “incontestable” importance of Sartre’s book

(Marcel, *Homo Viator* 166). Further, Marcel acknowledges the “admirable analysis of bad faith” in *Being and Nothingness*, an analysis that reveals “the existence of a being so constituted that it is not exactly or fully what it is ....” (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 167). Nonetheless, Marcel considers Sartre as trapped in a web of immanence (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 178-180, 183-184). Sartre reduces the soul to the body (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 178; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 310). Moreover, Sartre explains how the absence of another can still appear as a presence except in the case of death (Sartre, *Being* 278-279). According to Marcel, Sartre thus denies the “communion” of the living and the dead, even from a “phenomenological point of view” (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 178). Thus, Marcel refers to “the *en-soi*,” or “being-in-itself,” as “grossly materialistic” (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 178). Despite Sartre’s affirmation of the importance of freedom, Marcel still finds parallels between Sartre’s ontology and the ontology of the “epiphenomenist” school, which considered the mind as a byproduct of material causes (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 179; Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 52; “Philosophy of Mind” 598; cf. Collins 74). Perhaps it is enough to say that, like Percy, Marcel could momentarily set aside his philosophical and religious differences with Sartre to appreciate Sartre’s phenomenological descriptions, especially his account of “bad faith.” Indeed, Sartre’s “bad faith” complements Marcel’s account of the “simulacrum.”

Marcel describes how simulacra, or representations of reality, threaten to conceal the existence of the self to itself as well as the existence of the other to the self (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 53). What does Marcel mean by “simulacrum”? In the first volume of *The Mystery of Being*, Marcel explains a simulacrum as an “illumination” of reality that has hardened over and taken the place of the original experience (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 53). A simulacrum appears as a “shell” of reality that threatens to usurp reality’s place (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 53). Anything that reveals existence—from a “work of art” to a “landscape”—threatens

to deteriorate into a mere simulacrum (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 53). Marcel describes a simulacrum as a “*locum tenens*,” or a holding place meant to temporarily take the place of existence, which always threatens “to free itself from its proper subordinate position and to claim a kind of independence to which it has no right ....” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 53). As Percy might suggest, the symbol necessarily mediates knowledge of existence in C1 consciousness. But a symbol can also devolve into a simulacrum and lead to error, ignorance, and idolatry in C2 consciousness (Percy, *Symbol & Existence*). Consider Percy’s example of the young child naming a sparrow, which over time becomes merely an instance or a “husk” of a sparrow (Percy, *Lost* 104-105; Percy, *The Message* 206; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 103). Through the repeated use of language, the symbol “sparrow” degenerates into a mere simulacrum that no longer inspires wonder. The particularity of the bird vanishes, and boredom ensues, which involves a “weakening of the sense of being” and the “disappearance of joy” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 38). Whereas Marcel does not necessarily use Percy’s language of the symbol, Marcel nevertheless describes what happens when someone encounters reality at one remove in the simulacrum. Marcel suggests that bad philosophers in the past have dealt with “a waste product of experience that had taken experience’s name” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 54). Such a “waste product” is nothing less than a simulacrum, which may obscure the existence of the self or the other. Marcel explains “how difficult it is to succeed in getting a direct glimpse of whatever it is that we mean by *self*” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 52). Even when we ask another person for an adequate appraisal of who we are, he or she might reply with a mere simulacrum, a reification of our personality. Furthermore, it is oftentimes the case that we have chosen this other person to judge us, who may love us or hate us, and thus we cannot escape the quandary of having a say in our own appraisal (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 148-

149). With regard to the simulacrum obscuring the other's existence, Marcel gives the scenario of having to provide a character testimony for an acquaintance (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 54). The simulacrum that we possess of our friend may alter our attitude or behavior toward him or her for the worse (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 54). Thus, it becomes necessary to consider whether we are dealing with a mere phantasm of the other or whether we are dealing with the other in his or her existential particularity. Altogether, Marcel's religious background and his position on the difficulty of knowing the self led him to consider the human being not as a "nought" but rather as *homo viator*.

Indeed, Marcel thought of the human being as a traveler, or *homo viator*. Marcel did not think that the question "Who am I?" admitted of an easy answer. Marcel writes, "'Who am I?' ... is a riddle that, at the human level, simply cannot be solved: it is a question that does not imply, and cannot imply, any plain answer" (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 149). Many might balk at the idea that the self cannot know itself or that science cannot answer this question (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 18). Yet, so long as an individual lives, he or she might become something more or something less. Further, the words "at the human level" in Marcel's quote above suggest that only God can truly know the answer to this question. According to Marcel, a human being is a "'being on the way' (*en route*)" with an "exigence" for transcendence (Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: II. Faith & Reality* 3; Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 11; Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 39n). Contrasting his definition of "transcendence" with Sartre's, which involves "transcendence in immanence" on a "horizontal" plane, Marcel writes, "I would rather cling to the traditional antithesis between the immanent and the transcendent as it is presented to us in textbooks of metaphysics and theology" (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 39; Sartre, *Being* 34).<sup>11</sup> Unlike

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<sup>11</sup> While Marcel acknowledges how one might consider "transcendence" in terms of both space and time, Marcel seems to associate Sartre's understanding of "transcendence" with "projects" oriented toward a future time (Marcel,

Sartre, Marcel did not find being to be “de trop.” Instead, mystery permeates existence and calls out for participation (Collins Ch. 4; Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 111, 125, 211-219). Who or what does the traveling in this life? For Marcel, the soul—neither mere mind nor brain—does the journeying (Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 10-11). The soul journeys through life, seeking signs of deliverance from his or her predicament. Further, the soul never travels alone. Life implies “fellow-travelers” (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 17). For Marcel, egotism cuts the self off from communion with others (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 7-8). The self can only understand itself by “starting from the other, or from others, and only by starting from them...” (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 8). The other does not stand over against the self as an obstacle in the way of the self’s freedom (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 9). Rather, the other makes love possible, including *agape* (self-sacrificing love) and *philia* (friendship) (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 9; Lewis, *The Four Loves* 57-90, 116-141). The more that the self turns inward on itself, the more that the self loses contact with being (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 16-17). Thus, Percy formulated his anthropology with the help of Marcel’s *homo viator*. Percy could have settled on a scientific or even Marxist description of the human being either as a locus of various immanent “needs” or as a byproduct of history (Percy as qtd. in Carr 63-64; Percy, *Lost* 81). Instead, however, Percy preferred to describe the human being as “born to trouble as the sparks fly up” (Percy, *Signposts* 375). In addition to *homo viator*, Percy used the terms “seeker,” “wayfarer,” and “pilgrim” when describing the human being (Percy, *Signposts* 290-291). Percy found Marcel’s *homo viator* to be especially congenial to his vocation as a novelist. The novelist must consider his or her main characters “in transit,” “in a fix,” in a predicament, or on a journey (Percy as qtd. in Carr 64;

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*I. Reflection & Mystery* 39). Thus, Marcel’s “transcendence” invites consideration of the “vertical,” theological, timeless plane—whereas Sartre’s remains focused on various “projects” that relate to the future (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 39). Nevertheless, Marcel insists that, in his understanding of “transcendence,” transcendence does not occur “beyond all experience” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 47-48).

Percy as qtd. in Forkner and Kennedy 231-232). The main character in Percy's *The Last Gentleman*, for example, journeys throughout the United States on a quest for meaning (Percy as qtd. in Cremeens 29; Percy, *The Last Gentleman*). The character's geographical movements parallel his spiritual development. For Marcel, life itself appears as a drama, a story that presupposes both exile and redemption, the latter of which *homo viator* must await with an "availability of soul" and openness toward transcendence otherwise known as "hope" (Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 10, 67).

In this section, I compared and contrasted some of Sartre's and Marcel's ideas to better understand what Percy means by C2 consciousness. As I sought to demonstrate above, both Sartre and Marcel influenced Percy. Sartre's descriptions of the self as "nothing" and "bad faith" inform Percy's understanding of the unspeakability of the self as well as the self's quest for a permanent semiotic habiliment. Percy drew upon Marcel's account of simulacrum when accounting for the degeneration of C1 consciousness, the loss of joy, and the advent of boredom. Individuals no longer encounter existence but rather existence at one remove. Further, Marcel's *homo viator* inspired Percy's anthropology. Rather than reifying the self, *homo viator* makes room for a self "en route" toward something greater (Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 11). In both Percy's and Marcel's case, *homo viator* searches for an encounter with the living God. Transcendence does not move away from experience and into a mere simulacrum (Marcel, *I, Reflection & Mystery* 53-54). Rather, transcendence implies intersubjective communion and movement away from the self (Percy, *Lost* 121, 124). Thus, the prospect of symbolically induced ignorance described in this section means that *homo viator* needs something (or, more precisely, someone) beyond itself to help shatter the symbolic reifications, recover existence, and experience transcendence once more. In the next chapter, I will review various means for



breaking through symbolic reifications. Before moving onto that, however, I first need to account for the role of Heidegger in Percy's thought. Anyone seeking to further understand C2 consciousness would do well to consider what Percy learned from Heidegger, who, like Sartre and Marcel, oftentimes received the label "existentialist."

*Heidegger: Everydayness as the "Reverse Phenomenon"*

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a German existential phenomenologist, exerted a notable influence on Percy's thought. Like Sartre and Marcel and unlike most empirical scientists, Heidegger sought to describe the experience of the self, or "Dasein," in the world. In this section, I briefly review the importance of Heidegger to Percy's thought. I begin first by summarizing some of the main ideas in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Second, I work through the specific ways that Percy utilized Heidegger's thought to understand C2 consciousness. Percy drew upon Heidegger's account of Dasein's "fall" into the "they" when critiquing the lay/consumer distinction that the immanent self can surrender to. Further, Heidegger's account of "everydayness" in *Being and Time* relates directly to C2 consciousness. Indeed, Percy calls "everydayness" the "reverse phenomenon" of the "Helen Keller phenomenon" (Percy, *Signposts* 353). Recall that the "Helen Keller phenomenon" refers to C1 consciousness' joyful concelebration of the world with others, which the mediation of the symbol makes possible. Thus, "everydayness" has little in common with joy, concelebration, or others. Percy associated Heidegger's account of Dasein's "fall" into the "they" with Sartre's "nothing" and Marcel's "wound" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). Third, I outline a key difference between Percy and Heidegger concerning the meaning of "authenticity," which merits special attention. Many

rightly reject the term “authenticity” for its individualistic overtones. Percy, however, understands authenticity in a manner that implies the intersubjective concelebration of being.

Percy drew largely upon Heidegger’s famous *Being and Time*, which first appeared in 1927. *Being and Time* contains a number of novel phrases and philosophical ideas that I must first unpack here before moving onto a discussion of how Percy appropriated Heidegger’s ideas. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger questions the meaning of Being. Some consider the meaning of “Being” as self-evident, indefinable, or universal (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21). Yet, for Heidegger, the question of the meaning of Being merits attention because, among other things, it lacks an answer and because philosophers have forgotten about the question (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21-24). Since “Being” is not an entity in the world like other entities, “Being” cannot be defined like other entities within the world (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 23). Thus, Heidegger proposes to investigate the question of the meaning of Being by analyzing “Dasein,” or the “being-there” otherwise known as the human being (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 21-67, 227). Heidegger writes, “We are ourselves the entities to be analyzed” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 67). According to Heidegger, Dasein finds itself “thrown” (*Geworfenheit*) into a world of meaning (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 174, 174n1). The world appears laden with meaning, and Dasein “comports itself understandingly” towards entities in the world (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 78, 182-195). Even before conscious reflection takes place, Dasein always already understands the world and its possibilities within it in a given way (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 185; cf. Anton, *Selfhood and Authenticity* 24-36).<sup>12</sup> Further, things appear in the world “as” one

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<sup>12</sup> The distinction between environment and world, *Umwelt* and *Welt*, appears in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 83-84, 92-95). Nevertheless, Percy suggests that his own understanding of “world” does not necessarily rely “on Heidegger or any other philosophical anthropology” (Percy, *The Message* 203n). Percy suggests that, while his understanding of “environment” and “world” relates most closely to Ludwig Binswanger’s account of *Umwelt* and *Welt*, the empirical event of naming, as evidenced by children learning to speak and the “Helen Keller phenomenon,” provided enough evidence that humans inhabit a “world” substantially different from an animal’s “environment” (Percy, *The Message* 203n).

thing or another. A hammer, for example, appears “as” a manipulatable something to hammer with (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 98, 189). Heidegger writes, “What we ‘first’ hear is never noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon [sic], the motor-cycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 207). Heidegger preoccupies himself with the way Being conceals or reveals itself to Dasein, as well as how Dasein comports itself towards its possibilities in the world. With regard to the concealment of Being, Heidegger thought of truth as “aletheia,” an unconcealment of Being wherein entities reveal themselves “as” one thing or another to Dasein (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 56-60). Heidegger writes, “Truth (uncoveredness) is something that must always first be wrested from entities. Entities get snatched out of their hiddenness” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 265). Elsewhere, Heidegger states, “Once entities have been uncovered, they show themselves precisely as entities which beforehand already were” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 269). Such disclosed entities might include anything from Newton’s laws to the “principle of contradiction” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 269). By implication, Dasein discovers entities in the sciences and arts alike. Importantly, these uncovered entities need Dasein to come to light (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 269). Discourse, or *Rede*, a characteristic mode of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, uncovers entities in the world and allows them to be seen as what they are (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 56, 203-210). Heidegger seems to reject an overly rationalistic interpretation of the ζῷον λόγον ἔχον (*zoon logon echon*), Aristotle’s “rational animal” or “animal with logos,” and instead prefers a description of the human being as simply the “entity which talks” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 47, 47n, 74, 208). “Authenticity” figures as a key term for Heidegger because Dasein may talk and comport itself either in an authentic or inauthentic manner. In the existentialist tradition of giving freedom priority over *a priori* essences,

Heidegger believes that authenticity presupposes Dasein's openness to its own possibilities for Being (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 67-68, 232). Inauthenticity, on the other hand, presupposes a fall into the world of the "they," or "*Das Man*" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 164, 220, 220n1).

Thus, the "they" conceal Being from Dasein and contribute to Dasein's inauthenticity. Note that Heidegger uses the "they" in a singular sense to indicate a sort of monolithic, irresponsible, anonymous mass. The "they" demands "*averageness*" of interpretation and a type of "'levelling down' [*Einebnung*] of all possibilities of Being" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 164-165). The "they" refuses to make distinctions: "[I]t [the 'they'] is insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 165). The average understanding of the "they" does not like distinctions because the "they" already "understands everything" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 212). The fall into "everydayness" involves the consumption of judgments prescribed by the "they." In his description of the consumptive attitude that Dasein may take toward the "they," Heidegger writes,

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The 'they,' which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 164)

Heidegger's description of how the "they" informs Dasein's understanding reminds one of the mass media today, wherein the continuous news cycle on TV and websites, among other things, dictate the proper judgments for Dasein to assume. Thus, Dasein consumes interpretations and construes its own possibilities for Being in an inauthentic manner when it succumbs to the "they." Being cannot reveal itself in its full plenitude and inexhaustibility to a Dasein bewitched

by the “publicly interpreted” meanings of the “they” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 264). When Dasein falls into the world of the “they,” Dasein accepts the various interpretations of its world as coming from the “they” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 167). Heidegger suggests that the “they” deprives Dasein of its “answerability,” its responsibility for its own decisions (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 165). The “they” is a “no one” or a “nobody” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 165-166). Recall here, too, how the logos in discourse reveals entities “as” one thing or another for Dasein. When Dasein comports itself authentically, discourse snatches entities from out of their hiddenness in accordance with truth, or aletheia. However, discourse has its own inauthentic modes, including “idle talk,” “curiosity,” and “ambiguity” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 211-220). Idle talk, or *Gerede*, a type of superficial understanding, does not admit of any inquiry or disputation but instead appears as gossiping, “passing along,” and unreflectively consuming “average” interpretations (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 211-214, 217). Curiosity, a type of concupiscent desire to know, seeks “novelty,” “*distraction*,” and knowledge of things “just in order to have known” them (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 214-217). The proliferation of the average, public interpretations of the “they” leads to ambiguity, wherein it “becomes impossible to decide what is disclosed in a genuine understanding and what is not” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 217). Rather than considering the fall into the “they” as something that only uncultivated dupes suffer from, inauthenticity remains possible for each and every Dasein (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 223-224). In fact, Heidegger writes, “The Self, however, is proximally and for the most part inauthentic, the they-self” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 225). Heidegger also states, “Far from determining its nocturnal side, it [falling into the “they”] constitutes all Dasein’s days in their everydayness” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 224). Inauthenticity and everydayness appear more like the rule rather than the exception. Finally, the phenomenon of anxiety appears as a

summons rooted in the structure of Being that calls Dasein out of its familiarity, everydayness, and inauthenticity. Like Being, anxiety is not simply one more entity in the world (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 231). Heidegger explains, “[T]he publicness of the ‘they’ suppresses everything unfamiliar” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 237). Yet, anxiety involves an “uncanniness” and unfamiliarity that presses in upon Dasein in such a way that it cannot “flee *into* the ‘at-home’ of publicness” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 233-234). Thus, the “they” seeks to conceal perhaps the most anxiety inducing event that Dasein can (and will) experience: death (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 296-304). The “they” conceals the “certainty” of death from Dasein and instead invites distraction (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 302-303). Altogether, rather than a mere psychological phenomena requiring suppression and eradication, anxiety may be a call for Dasein to authentically realize its own possibilities (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 228-235). Having summarized some key ideas contained in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, I turn to consider how Percy drew upon Heidegger.

Percy appreciated several ideas in Heidegger’s philosophy, which contributed to Percy’s description of C2 consciousness and its attendant alienation. To begin, Percy considered Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein as an alternative approach to anthropology, much like Marcel’s *homo viator* (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 114). Whether or not you agree with or even like Heidegger, Heidegger provided an alternative way for considering the human being outside of naturalistic, scientific categories. Humans do not simply exist like animals in an environment but rather live and move and have their being in a world of meaning. Percy thus expresses the usefulness of Heidegger’s term “Dasein,” which Percy seems to have considered as roughly equivalent to the “self” (Percy, *Lost* 86n). In a manuscript that he sent to Kenneth Laine Ketner, Percy explains that Heidegger’s term “Dasein”

bears no semantic freight; it simply signifies what it says; a being there, and better still, as Heidegger explicates it, a being there in the world—and by the world he means *Welt*, all that is out there and that we name, and not *Umwelt*, the environment. (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 113)

Percy knew that words can become charged with meaning over time, especially the “self,” and so “Dasein” “bears no semantic freight.” In other words, the term “Dasein” may in fact subvert the psychological connotations usually associated with the term “self.” Indeed, Dasein does not appear as some sort of isolated entity in the void. Instead, every Dasein has a world. Human beings find themselves cast into a world not of their own making and inherit names for entities given long before their arrival. Indeed, humans find themselves “thrown” into such a world (Percy, *Lost* 86n). Percy’s metaphor of the human being as a “castaway” in a predicament thus relates to Heidegger’s “thrownness” (Percy, *The Message* 146).<sup>13</sup> Like Sartre and Marcel, Heidegger provided Percy with a description of a distinctly human predicament otherwise inarticulable in purely scientific terms (Percy as qtd. in Gullledge 300). The human predicament implies a world of meaning thanks to the symbol, which opens up the “as-structure of interpretation” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 200-201). Percy writes, “To amend the phenomenologist: It is not enough to say that one is conscious *of* something; one is also conscious of something as being something” (Percy, *The Message* 272-273). However, only some phenomenologists stop at the “of” structure of consciousness. Percy perhaps did not give enough credit to Heidegger on this point, because Heidegger repeatedly describes Dasein’s

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<sup>13</sup> Some have noted the similarities between Heidegger’s “thrownness” and the Gnostic understanding of the human being as violently cast into an evil, material world (Jonas, “Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Nihilism” 211-213, 229, Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* 7-8). While I see no reason to defend Heidegger as a Gnostic in one way or another, I would insist on Percy’s anti-Gnosticism. As his letters to Kenneth Laine Ketner attest, Percy was no Gnostic (see Ketner and Percy’s exchange in Samway, *A Thief of Peirce* 20-25; Brooks, “Walker Percy and Modern Gnosticism”).

encounter of entities in the world “as” one thing or another (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 189, 200-202, 207, 266). Percy’s understanding of the role of the symbol in mediating consciousness “of” reality “as” one thing or another eventually helped him to identify the ultimate semiotic predicament: the struggle of the self to conceive itself through symbolic means.

Perhaps above all, Heidegger’s description of the “they” remains absolutely central to Percy’s understanding of C2 consciousness. Heidegger describes the “*falling*,” or *Verfallen*, of Dasein into the “everydayness” of the “they” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 219-220). In *Symbol & Existence*, Percy discusses Heidegger’s *Verfallen* alongside Sartre’s “Nought” and Marcel’s “wound” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111). Percy writes,

In what can only be described as a fall, a falling prey to (Heidegger’s *Verfallen*), I, who in my most authentic relation to the world, am a co-celebrant of being, become a despairing specter, a that-which-does-not-know-what-it-is, an emptiness amid a world of replete entities. (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 111)

In this quote, Percy suggests that Heidegger, like Sartre and Marcel, captures the symbolically induced alienation that characterizes C2 consciousness. The fall into the “they” involves a falling prey to *a priori* symbolic constructions, or the “publicly interpreted” world so well described by Heidegger (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 264; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 131). The “they-self” takes comfort in what the experts have to say about his or her predicament (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 225; Percy, “The Loss of the Creature”). Indeed, the “they” often consider the human being as no more than an animal in an environment with a discrete set of needs. Conversations in everyday life attest to the reign of the “they” anytime someone appeals to what “they” say. “They” say *this*, or “they” say *that*. Who are “they,” after all? Who is this anonymous, shadowy group of elite knowers that you or I may appeal to at any time and in any place? Heidegger might



reply: “no one,” “nobody” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 165-166). The “they” seek to heal the “wound” described by Marcel and to fill the “nothing” described by Sartre. But can they?

Ultimate questions about the meaning of life, the meaning of death, and even the meaning of Being (Heidegger’s favorite question) get swept away by the current of the “they.” When the self falls prey to the “they,” the self ceases to take joy in actively naming existence and settles into a passive habit of preferring representations over reality. The “they-self” understands the world according to the dictates of established opinion (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 225). The “they” “prescribes” interpretations for Dasein (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 167). Such prescriptions may inform the self’s scientific, artistic, or even religious judgments. In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy describes both the immanent self and the transcendent self in relation to the “they.” On one hand, the immanent consumer self absorbs the interpretations prescribed by the “they” (Percy, *Lost* 113). Percy describes both the “beer-drinking TV-watcher” and the “backfence gossip” as surrendering to the “they” (Percy, *Lost* 113). Percy suggests that Heidegger’s other “existentialia” such as *Gerede* and “curiosity” also pertain to the immanent self (Percy, *Lost* 113n). On the other hand, the transcendent self joins the “they,” or those who know, by becoming a scientist or an artist (Percy, *Lost* 113-126). Percy spells out the danger faced by both the immanent self and the transcendent self: Neither actually escapes the semiotic predicament of having to answer the question “[B]ut *what am I?*” (Percy, *The Message* 284). The transcendent self may temporarily forget the question in an act of intersubjective communion, but such transcendence cannot endure forever (Percy, *Lost* 114-126). Even the autonomous self, a creature trapped in immanence, struggles to extricate himself or herself from the semiotic predicament via self-realization (Percy, *Lost* 113). But everydayness and semiotic devaluation always creep back in for both the immanent and the transcendent self. Percy’s *Lost in the Cosmos* appears as

perhaps the most direct and humorous application of Heidegger's philosophy. Indeed, Percy suggests that in *Lost in the Cosmos*, he had sought to give "some semiotic grounding" to Heidegger's "existentialia," or "Dasein's characters of Being" (Percy as qtd. in Abádi-Nagy 145; Heidegger, *Being and Time* 70). In addition to *Lost in the Cosmos*, Heidegger influenced Percy's approach to novel writing in general. Percy claimed that his novels were a way of exploring Heidegger's "existentialia" such as "everydayness" ("*alltäglichkeit*"), albeit in a more accessible form than Heidegger had provided (Percy as qtd. in Gullledge 300; Percy as qtd. in Richard et al. 165). In *The Thanatos Syndrome*, Percy describes a woman lacking nothing in the way of material comforts who nevertheless has fallen into the "they" and adopted an inauthentic manner of being (Percy, *Signposts* 390; Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome* 5-10, 370-372). With the help of Heidegger, Percy reminds us that a semiotically devalued world always remains a possibility, especially to the unsuspecting consumer in a mass society.

Even still, the fall into inauthenticity implies its dialectical counterpart: authenticity, a much-contested term that for Percy means nothing less than the restoration of intersubjective communion. Thus, I begin here to move beyond the darkness of C2 consciousness and turn to briefly consider truth in Percy's thought as the disclosure of existence for the self and the other. For Percy, the authentic self paradoxically loses itself in the act of naming (Percy, *Lost* 124). Recall that the understanding of truth as a type of revelation appears in Heidegger. Heidegger calls truth *aletheia*, a type of uncovering of existence where entities show themselves "as entities which beforehand already were" (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 269). For Percy, true scientists and artists reveal truth and once again experience a taste of C1 consciousness. The good scientist and the good artist name for both the self and the other and thereby accomplish intersubjective communion, a "partial recovery of Eden, the semiotic Eden" (Percy, *Lost* 124). Percy uses Kafka

as an example of an artist who reveals truth by naming a pre-existing predicament that others recognize (Percy, *Lost* 120-121). Percy explains how Kafka escapes the predicament of C2 consciousness “by *seeing* and naming what had heretofore been unspeakable, the predicament of the self in the modern world” (Percy, *Lost* 120). In other words, naming the alienation of C2 consciousness leads to its reversal (Percy, *The Message* 5). Why? Because true naming, naming that results in the disclosure of existence, results in intersubjective communion, too. Kafka’s readers can truly exclaim, “Yes! that [sic] is how it is! ....” (Percy, *The Message* 83). The ability to name in an authentic manner, which the good artist exemplifies, is a distinctly human capacity. Percy writes,

Man is not merely a higher organism responding to and controlling his environment. He is, in Heidegger’s words, that being in the world whose calling it is to find a name for Being, to give testimony to it, and to provide for it a clearing. (Percy, *The Message* 158)

According to Jay Tolson, one of Percy’s biographers, this particular passage from *The Message in the Bottle* “could not have come much closer to an explicit statement of the metaphysical and even religious direction of his language philosophy” (Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins* 266). Despite Percy’s understanding of the importance of finding “a name for Being,” however, and contrary to Tolson’s statement here, Percy and Heidegger had very different metaphysical and religious presuppositions.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps more so than anything else, Percy and Heidegger disagreed on the ultimate meaning of the term “authenticity,” which I now turn to consider.

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Percy appreciated Scholastics like Aquinas as well as John of St. Thomas and did not eschew the religious implications of the human predicament, whereas Heidegger sought to destroy the “history of ontology” and to avoid any considerations about the Fall of Man (Collins 168-210; Heidegger, *Being and Time* 44, 74, 126, 224, 272). Clearly, these two thinkers had different metaphysical and religious presuppositions. Though, Percy certainly learned a great deal from Heidegger’s writings.

For Percy, authenticity has more to do with the restoration of intersubjectivity and an openness to the Thou than with individual self-realization (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 161). Without question, the term “authenticity” comes with significant philosophical baggage. Some have seriously and rightfully criticized authenticity as an ideal to aim for (Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* 166-167; Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*). Oftentimes, people will speak about the individualistic pursuit of becoming your “authentic” and “true” self. However, even without considering Percy’s religious presuppositions, the aforementioned discussion of C2 consciousness clearly indicates that Percy would not advocate for such an individualistic ideal. How can a self that cannot know itself become its “true” and “authentic” self? It would not make any sense. Like Percy’s treatment of Sartre, Percy takes what he likes in Heidegger’s philosophy, especially Heidegger’s phenomenological descriptions, and leaves the rest, especially Heidegger’s ontology. Indeed, Percy holds out hope that someone who has fallen into the “they” can begin to live “authentically” as a seeker and wayfarer, much like Marcel’s *homo viator* in communion with “fellow-travelers” (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 17; Percy, *Signposts* 290). But Percy’s understanding of authenticity does not necessarily agree with Heidegger’s individualistic understanding of authenticity as the openness of Dasein to its “ownmost” possibilities for Being (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 308). Following Sartre, Percy did not think that Heidegger escaped the “spectre of solipsism” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 148; Sartre, *Being* 246-248). If Being discloses itself through Dasein, then what becomes of the Other? Does the Other need Dasein in order to be? If so, how can the Other be anything but a figment of Dasein’s imagination (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 148; Sartre, *Being* 246-248)?<sup>15</sup> Thus, instead of echoing Heidegger’s

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<sup>15</sup> Further, like Sartre, Percy did not think that Heidegger’s ontological notion of “Mitsein,” or “Being-with,” adequately accounted for what Percy called the “concrete empirical encounter” with the other (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 149-168; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 148; Sartre, *Being* 248-249).

individualistic impulses, Percy leans more on Buber and Marcel. Percy uses the term “authentic” to describe Buber’s I-Thou relationship, which Percy contrasts to the “deteriorated” I-It relationship (Buber, *I and Thou*; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 161). For Buber, Heidegger’s analytic of Dasein abstracted the human being from all of its essential relations with others and made solitariness the rule rather than the exception (Buber, *Between Man and Man* 200, 215). Percy would likely agree with Buber’s statement that “Man can become whole not in virtue of a relation to himself but only in virtue of a relation to another self” (Buber, *Between* 199). Marcel, too, acknowledges the primacy of the intersubjective relationship and the metaphysic of “we are” over and above the solitary “I think” (Marcel, *II. Faith & Reality* 9). Ego consciousness thus appears as a “myth” or “deterioration” of intersubjectivity for Percy (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 164, 237). Thus, both Chapter 2 and this chapter (Chapter 3) support the notion that intersubjectivity necessarily precedes the isolated experience of the “self.” In this section, then, I have sought to give Heidegger his due without remaining mired in the “pit” of the self.

Although Percy and Heidegger had very different metaphysical and religious presuppositions, both recognized the importance of the logos in human experience. The logos, humanity’s unique possession, discloses existence. Thus, I began this section by reviewing some key ideas in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Next, I discussed how Heidegger’s ideas have appeared in Percy’s writings, including his non-fiction and fiction works. I sought to emphasize especially how the self may fall prey to the “they.” I concluded this section with a discussion of “authenticity,” a term rightfully contested for its individualistic connotations. However, I insisted that Percy thought of Buber’s I-Thou relation as “authentic.” Percy considered intersubjectivity as desirable and even normative (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 161, 193).<sup>16</sup> The importance given

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Percy’s stance on normative evaluations with the position of Heidegger, who sought to avoid normative evaluations when discussing Dasein’s “falling” into the “they” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 219-220, 264-265).

to intersubjectivity, then, becomes one way of separating Percy's thought from other existentialists, especially Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre considered other people in terms of "hell." In his play *No Exit*, Sartre wrote, "[L]'enfer c'est les autres," or "Hell is other people" (Percy, *Signposts* 290; Sartre, *Huis Clos* 91). And, as mentioned above, Heidegger thought of authenticity as an individual's realization of his or her own possibilities.<sup>17</sup> Buber, Marcel, and Percy, on the other hand, esteem intersubjectivity. For Marcel, hope goes beyond the solitary self and seeks the good of the other (Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 10). Marcel also calls despair a type of "spiritual autophagy" wherein the self collapses in on itself and makes itself "the centre" (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 44). Percy writes, "In the joy of naming, one lives authentically" (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 193). Of course, joy follows from naming for another who recognizes the name as revelatory. I have spent enough time wading through the darkness of C2 consciousness, and thus I would like to now pivot into the lighter, more transcendent C3 consciousness. Before moving onto a discussion of C3 consciousness, however, I must first recount some implications that follow from the aforementioned for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

### *Implications for Rhetoric, Philosophy of Communication, and Media Ecology*

Scholars of rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology could benefit from Percy's insights into C2 consciousness. In this section, then, I first review why Marcel and Percy's account of the simulacrum matters for an ethics of rhetoric. Second, I explain the

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<sup>17</sup> In Collins' generous interpretation of Heidegger, Collins explains that, unlike Sartre, Heidegger does not believe in the absurdity of "being-in-itself." Rather, Heidegger understands Dasein as "there" for being to disclose itself through (Collins 201). Further, Collins suggests that Heidegger's understanding of the role of the philosopher has much in common with Marcel's *homo viator*. Collins writes, "The philosopher's function as a 'wanderer,' a *homo viator* (in Marcel's terms), is both to respect the incomprehensibility of being and to offer guidance to his fellow men" (Collins 195).

significance of C2 consciousness for philosophy of communication. As it pertains to metaphors for describing the self, I consider some implications of Percy's thought for the "situated" and "embedded" self. Further, therapeutic approaches to communication, which prioritize the self, fail to acknowledge the primacy of intersubjectivity. Finally, with regard to media ecology, I discuss how the self attempts to fix itself in mediated forms. The self experiences delight at both mediating itself and piercing through the mediations to encounter existence once more. Percy himself speculates as to whether the difficulty of knowing the self stems from the primacy given to the sense of vision. Thus, I expand upon Percy's insights about ocularcentrism and relate these insights to the thought of Ong.

To begin, Percy's ideas about C2 consciousness can inform an ethics of rhetoric. As a "wound" or a "nought," the self remains easy prey for political ideologies in this historical moment (Ellul, *Propaganda* 6, 61). As noted in Chapter 1, Engnell put Marcel and Percy into conversation to formulate an ethics of using holocaust-related language (Engnell). However, Engnell does not appear to have related Marcel and Percy to the thought of Richard Weaver or Kenneth Burke. Here, I would like stress that Marcel and Percy's "simulacra" relate to Weaver's "ultimate terms" and Burke's "term[s]" with a "god-function," which short-circuit thought and induce magical thinking (Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form* 448; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 131; Weaver, "Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric").<sup>18</sup> According to Percy, words that symbolize "remote," "obscure," "complex," "abstract," or "nonexistent" referents threaten to become mere simulacra (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 92). For example, words like "democracy" and "Christianity" may lack immediate referents and thereby may "operate not as miraculous

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<sup>18</sup> I leave unaddressed the question concerning whether Burke or Weaver formulated the notion of "ultimate" or "god" terms first. Burke writes, "In a work of metaphysics, there is some term that has a 'god-function.' That is: its meaning derives from its rôle as a summation of all the other terms" (Burke, *Philosophy* 448; see also Johanneson as well as Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 183-189, 298-301).

vehicles of meaning but as dense impenetrable husks ....” (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 92). In his essay “Ultimate Terms in Contemporary Rhetoric,” Weaver defines a “god term” as “an expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers” (Weaver, “Ultimate” 212). Weaver suggests that certain taken-for-granted terms like “progress” stand atop a hierarchy of other terms and invite thoughtlessness as well as sacrifice (Weaver, “Ultimate” 212-214, 232). For Weaver, the word “modern” functions as an “epithet of approval,” while words such as “Nazi” and “Fascist” operate as “terms of repulsion,” or “devil term[s]” (Weaver, “Ultimate” 217, 222-223). Even today, the word “Fascist” still has a certain rhetorical effect. Someone who receives the label “Fascist” will undoubtedly lose credibility, at least in the public sphere.<sup>19</sup> Individuals or groups can use “terms of repulsion” in order to scapegoat others and advance their own political projects. For example, Burke indicated how Hitler used the Jews as a type of “symbolic vessel” to unify Germany (Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* 27, 194-198, 202-203). Weaver also warns against the hypostatization of certain terms (e.g., “science”) and the exaltation of terms that may lack any immediate reference (e.g., “efficient”) (Weaver, “Ultimate” 216). Due to the rhetorical potency of “ultimate terms,” political hucksters and charlatans can advance their own political projects simply by invoking “ultimate terms” (Weaver, “Ultimate” 290). The immanent consumer self, spellbound by ideological appeals, thus identifies with the symbols of technics and state (Burke, *Philosophy* 195n1; Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* 20-25). Politicians and even those in the business world can justify expensive and malign activities “in the name of” “freedom,” “democracy,” “progress,” etc. (Weaver, “Ultimate” 290). Burke notes that Hitler justified his murderous campaign “in the name of” “humility, love, and peace” (Burke, *Philosophy* 199). As Burke knew

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<sup>19</sup> The term “bigot” works in a similar manner to set apart “true believers” from less “radical,” more “balanced” individuals.



well, justifying actions “in the name of” one thing or another has definite magical connotations (Burke, *Philosophy* 3-4). Ask yourself: What cannot be justified “in the name of” “security,” “safety,” or “survival” today (Bonanno, “An Essential Business: Satisfying the Needs of the Soul”)? Ultimately, Weaver explains how subjecting “ultimate terms” to a dialectic could help to counteract their ill effects (Weaver, “Ultimate” 232). As noted above, drawing upon Sartre, Percy suggests that the gaze of the other could puncture the symbolic veil concealing the other. Percy gestures toward additional means for shattering symbolic simulacra, which I explore in depth in the following chapter. For now, it is perhaps enough to sketch out some similarities between Marcel, Percy, Weaver, and Burke. As it pertains to an ethics of rhetoric, *a priori* symbolic reifications can seduce an individual or collective to engage in unethical actions. Thus, the task of the critic is to counter symbolic reifications with a searching dialectic and sharp rhetorical criticism.

Furthermore, Percy recognized the dangers of the autonomous self, which certain philosophers, including philosophers of communication, have also realized. In lieu of calling the self “autonomous,” some scholars have put forward alternative qualifiers for the self such as “situated” and “embedded” (e.g., Arnett and Holba 88, 155, 204-205; Benhabib 6, 212-213; Taylor, *A Secular Age* Ch. 3). Heidegger’s “thrownness” and Gadamer’s insistence on “tradition” played at least some part in attempts to dethrone the autonomous self (Arnett and Holba 80, 88). The self finds itself in a world of meaning informed by historical events and concrete happenings. Individuals deceive themselves when they believe in their absolute independence from others (Anton, *Sources of Significance* 16-21). As Alasdair MacIntyre writes, “For the story of my life is always *embedded* in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity” (MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 221; emphasis mine). The so-called autonomous

self always already finds itself within a narrative charged with value (Arnett and Arneson Ch. 4). Percy, who referred to the “expanding nought of the autonomous self” and who recognized the “deracination of Western culture,” would likely have appreciated the qualifiers “situated” and “embedded” (Percy, *Lost* 81, 181). As Percy knew, the self inhabits a world populated with meaning. The child learns to speak at a young age and along with learning to speak also learns values and value-laden expressions, including the hortatory “No!” (Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* 9-13). The self does not simply find itself “embedded,” however; it finds itself embedded in a predicament and in need of an answer. What is the predicament? The self faces the question, “[B]ut *what am I?*” (Percy, *The Message* 284). In my estimation, then, Percy would not only recognize the “situated” self but also stress the continual uprooting and dislocating of the self (Percy, *The Message* 111). Influenced by Marcel’s *homo viator*, Percy might thus insist on the self as “situating” in addition to “situated.”<sup>20</sup> The present participle, “situating,” differs from the past participle, “situated.” The former indicates an ongoing process, a happening, whereas the latter denotes a finished product. Recall here that, for Marcel and Percy, *homo viator* remains a “‘being on the way’ (*en route*)” (Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 11).<sup>21</sup> Like a character in a novel, a human being is “on the move” (Percy as qtd. in Cremeens 29; see also Percy as qtd. in Abádi-Nagy 143). The self not only finds itself in a narrative but may even switch to a different narrative, akin to a sort of symbolic migration. Atheists convert. Believers lose their faith. Republicans leave for the Democratic Party and vice-versa. Such conversions and exoduses from one narrative to another may not happen often, but they do in fact occur. The

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<sup>20</sup> To her credit, Benhabib’s book *Situating the Self* obviously contains the term “situating” in the title.

<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, wary of reifying “communication” into some sort of static entity, Klyukanov understands communication as a type of “being-on-the-way” (see Klyukanov Ch. 2). Heidegger’s influence appears in Klyukanov, too. Reflecting on Heidegger’s etymology of the word “method,” Klyukanov seems to refer to human being as “being-the-way-itself” (Klyukanov 31-32).

self may wind up “situated,” but the question becomes, “For how long?” Novel and nostalgic experiences alike promise transcendence and an escape from the self (Percy, *Lost* 180-181; Percy, *The Message* Ch. 4). The situating self has an itch that needs scratched and a vague inkling of the transcendent. All too often, of course, it searches in all the wrong places for some transcendent remedy to fill the void and “inform its own nothingness” (Percy, *Lost* 21). Marcel once described “metaphysical unease” in the following way: it “is like the bodily state of a man in a fever who will not lie still but keeps shifting around in his bed looking for the right position” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 7). And so it goes with the situating self. In this life, C2 consciousness experiences periodic, aggravated restlessness.<sup>22</sup> Percy writes, “modern man has lost his way, has not the faintest notion who he is or what he is doing, and nothing short of catastrophe will bring him to his senses” (Percy, *Lost* 44). Ultimately, Marcel suggests that a stable political order in this world can only occur after having considered the human being as a traveler on a journey (Marcel, *Homo Viator* 153-154; Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator* 7). Other approaches to the human being—which consider the human being as a mere animal, angel, or even robot—cannot but end in dehumanization (cf. Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* Chs. 2-3).

The critique of the autonomous self complements the rejection of therapeutic approaches to communication as well as emotivism. Some communication scholars have rejected therapeutic approaches to communication, which overemphasize the role of the self in the communicative act (Arnett, “A Dialogic Ethic ‘Between’ Buber and Levinas: A Responsive Ethical ‘I’”; Arnett and Arneson). The therapeutic culture thrives upon a cult of the self and emotivism, or decision-making by personal preference (Arnett and Arneson 62-67). In a therapeutic culture, individuals air their grievances and avoid being “judgy”; they emote (Arnett and Arneson 65; Fritz,

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps it is the case that the self only ends up truly “situated” once and for all after death.

*Professional Civility: Communicative Virtue at Work* 144). Troup and Marinchak describe one particular communicative manifestation of the therapeutic culture—niceness, a quasi-virtue parading around as the real thing (Troup and Marinchak). Fritz’s work distances “professional civility,” a real virtue, from a “therapeutic approach to discourse” (Fritz, *Professional Civility* 142). The notion of the “therapeutic” stems from Philip Rieff’s work *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, wherein Rieff explains how, in a postreligious age, psychology usurps the place previously held by religion in prescribing what to do and what not to do. The quest for health and normalcy in the immanent world replaces the transcendent journey towards salvation (Han 18, 50-51; Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* 217; Rieff 43). Rieff provides a succinct description of “therapeutic” in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. Rieff writes,

By this time men may have gone too far, beyond the old deception of good and evil, to specialize at last, wittingly, in techniques that are to be called, in the present volume, ‘therapeutic,’ with nothing at stake beyond a manipulatable sense of well-being. This is the unreligion of the age, and its master science.<sup>23</sup> (Rieff 10)

Thus, Rieff suggests that comfort rather than “the old deception of good and evil” takes center stage in a therapeutic culture, where individuals employ techniques put forward by experts, especially psychologists, to manipulate their “sense of well-being” (Rieff 10, 19). Elsewhere, Rieff writes, “Well-being is a delicate *personal* achievement ....” (Rieff 41; emphasis mine). Attending to one’s own sense of “well-being” takes precedence over communal concerns (Rieff 15-16, 43, 55-65). Thus, given his suspicion of experts, psychology, and the autonomous self, Percy would likely have appreciated the ideas put forward by the aforementioned thinkers regarding the pitfalls of therapeutic communication and the therapeutic culture, especially Rieff’s

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<sup>23</sup> Rieff describes “therapeutic” in adjectival terms here. Later in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, Rieff also describes the “therapeutic” as a “character type” (Rieff 202).

ideas. But Percy's work also extends the critique of emotivism and the therapeutic culture.<sup>24</sup> To begin with, when individuals in a therapeutic culture make decisions based on personal preference, they may neglect to attend to where these preferences come from. Preferences do not emerge without precedent, and individuals do not make them up on their own. Where do such preferences hail from, then? The "they" prescribes them, of course. Experts shower down information on the masses so that the latter might live more enriching, immanent lives (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 18-20, 142-145, 623). Psychologists play the role of transcendent expert, but other social scientists, too, assume the posture of knower and priest (Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* 154-186; Lasch, *The Minimal Self* 29). The news media creates the time and space necessary for experts to hawk their wares. In his essay "The Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," Percy explains how psychiatry does not account for the human desire for transcendence as some existentialists do (Percy, *Signposts* 251-262). Moreover, Rieff's description of "therapeutic" techniques enabling a "manipulatable sense of well-being" relates directly to Percy's thoughts on the human being as more than an animal in an environment. Scientific and artistic techniques can only do so much for an individual. Science and art cannot answer the question of the self because it is the question of questions, which presupposes a religious answer—whether theistic (Marcel) or not (Sartre). Nevertheless, experts, social engineers, and laymen of all stripes rely upon not only techniques but also technology to foster a "manipulatable sense of well-being."

In addition to rhetoric and philosophy of communication, Percy's insights about C2 consciousness have interesting implications for media ecology. Percy knew that people delight in encountering themselves in various media. Why? Perhaps because technology allows the self to

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<sup>24</sup> The genius of Percy's attack on the therapeutic culture lies in his satirical approach, which I will review further in the following chapter. While Rieff eventually stopped writing later in his career, Percy kept attacking the therapeutic mentality through indirect routes (for more on Rieff's silence, see Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* 220).

fix itself (and the other) into a relatively static entity, a thing among other things. Percy asks why individuals search for themselves first when viewing a photograph (Percy, *Lost* 7). Arguably, the photograph reifies the self into a fixed form, something conceivable. As shown above, the self searches for any sort of semiotic habiliment, and technology provides the illusion of such a habiliment. Consider Instagram and Facebook profiles today. Individuals post pictures of themselves and others. However, the question arises while one carefully selects which images to display and what to write: Is this my true, real self? After posting the perfect image, someone might exclaim, “Now I am being true to myself!” Further, having another confirm the mediated self elicits joy (Percy, *Lost* 120-121). Someone “likes” your picture or comments on your post. And if nobody “likes” or comments, then what? Thus, recalling Sartre and Marcel, technology can enable “bad faith” and facilitate simulacra formulation. However, paradoxically, technology can also shatter the simulacra of oneself and the other. Percy questions why people gaze at themselves in the reflections of shop mirrors when walking down the street (Percy, *Lost* 7). For Percy, the encounter with oneself in the immediacy of a mirror seems to break through the symbolic simulacra covering over the self’s existential particularity. Relatedly, people seek to destroy previous mediations of themselves online. Past Facebook or Instagram posts may conjure up a feeling of disgust. Who is this person? Was that me? Did I write that? Nowadays, individuals can pay someone to scour the Internet to delete instances of their previous selves. Consider also the examples given by Percy of the phenomenon of celebrity, which helps to reveal Percy’s insights into the relationship between technology, symbols, and existence (Percy, “The Decline of the Western”; Percy, *Lost* 37-40; Percy, *The Moviegoer* 11-17). Most people know celebrities through various media, especially images, TV shows, YouTube channels, movies, etc. Celebrities become symbols (Percy, *Lost* 40). Pleasure results in seeing celebrities

measure up to their mediated symbols (Percy, *Lost* 40). However, pleasure also follows from encountering celebrities in their existential particularity, seeing them in person, which tends to pierce through the *a priori* symbolic simulacra (Percy, *Lost* 40; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 131). Altogether, technology can facilitate the dialectic of simulacra formulation and self-forgetfulness, immanence and transcendence.

Moreover, with regard to implications for media ecology, Percy also subtly hints that the primacy of sight may have something to do with the inability to know oneself (Percy, *Lost* 211). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy puts the following into the mouth of the alien questioning the astronaut about his state of consciousness: “C2 selves don’t know who they are.\* Perhaps your difficulty comes from the sensory mode which you call ‘seeing.’ You ‘see’ things. But can you ‘see’ yourself? Who are you?” (Percy, *Lost* 211). Of course, the self can see itself in visual forms: mirrors, photographs, videos, etc. But, by default, the eyes face outward, not inward. Brain scans, for all of their usefulness, do not reveal the self qua self. Relatedly, Ong discusses how the various senses relate to self perception in *The Presence of the Word*.<sup>25</sup> Touch gives a “sense of oneself as sensing” (Ong, *The Presence of the Word* 169-173). Ong writes, “Each time I feel something, I also feel myself feeling what I feel” (Ong, *The Presence* 170). The sense of touch registers how objects in actuality resist the self (Ong, *The Presence* 171-172). Ong writes, “[T]he sense [of touch] which involves me most intimately also involves what is not me most inescapably” (Ong, *The Presence* 172).<sup>26</sup> The self can also register itself in the sense of taste, which Ong considers as “close to touch” (Ong, *The Presence* 170-171). However, sight

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<sup>25</sup> Ong cites Percy in *Hopkins, the Self, and God* while discussing names and the pronoun “I” (Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God* 33-34). Ong suggests that although the self cannot have a name, it can have a pronoun: “I” (Ong, *Hopkins* 33-37).

<sup>26</sup> Unlike sound, touch can only get at innerness by prying, and touch can easily “degenerate into object-like control (manipulation) of another” (Ong, *The Presence* 117-118, 169).

objectifies things, dissects them, reveals only surfaces, and understands events in sequence (Ong, *The Presence* 74, 128-130, 288-289). Ong writes, “Sight registers the stars, billions of light-years away. What could be less myself, more ‘other’?” (Ong, *The Presence* 171). Compare Ong’s question with Percy’s satirical subtitle for *Lost in the Cosmos*: “Why is it possible to learn more in ten minutes about the Crab Nebula in Taurus, which is 6,000 light-years away, than you presently know about yourself, even though you’ve been stuck with yourself all your life” (Percy, *Lost* 1). The eye thingifies the self and the other. Voice, on the other hand, registers the “actuality” and presence of the self and the other perhaps like no other sense (Ong, *The Presence* 174). Voice manifests the interiority and mystery of a person (Ong, *The Presence* 163). Ong cites Buber to suggest that an overemphasis on the visual sense, thanks to the advent and domination of the written word, tends to favor the I-It relationship over the I-Thou relationship (Ong, *The Presence* 289). Thus, certain parallels begin to emerge between Percy’s thought and Ong’s, which I can only begin to sketch out here. Importantly, I would like to acknowledge that just because the self cannot know itself through the mediation of the symbol, it does not follow that the self does not exist like some postmodernists would have us believe. I noted this in Chapter 1, but it bears repeating here.

Clearly, Percy’s work on C2 consciousness has significant implications for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology. In this final section, I began by explaining how rhetoricians could use Percy’s ideas about simulacra to formulate an ethics of rhetoric. Next, I discussed how Percy contributes to the idea of a “situating self” and to critiques of the therapeutic culture. I also considered certain implications of C2 consciousness for media ecology. The self delights in symbolic mediations of itself. Further, the primacy of sight plays a role in thingifying the self and the other. In the previous two chapters, I considered Anton’s



critique of Percy. Anton claims that Percy did not consider the influence of the alphabet on denotative utterance (Anton, “On the Nonlinearity of Human Communication,” 84). Indeed, Percy might not have explicitly considered the influence of alphabetic literacy on denotative utterance; however, Percy nevertheless associated the primacy of sight with the pitfalls of C2 consciousness. As media ecologists teach us, the alphabet creates a visual bias, translating all of the other senses into sight (Havelock, *Preface to Plato*; McLuhan and McLuhan, *The Laws of Media*; Ong, *Orality and Literacy*; Ong, *The Presence*).<sup>27</sup> Putting Percy into an extended conversation with Ong promises to yield more connections between Percy’s semiotic and the media ecology tradition. Altogether, this chapter has sought to underscore that the self longs for the embodied encounter with the real presence of the other and God in their existential fullness, where phantoms of simulacra cannot intervene. Indeed, the thrust toward transcendence involves intersubjective communion with other human beings and with God Himself. All idealists, social constructionists, and constructivists who hold more esteem for the symbol than for reality deal in a “waste product of experience” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 54).<sup>28</sup> By focusing on the ego, idealists tend to exacerbate the solipsism of C2 consciousness. Escaping the vortex of C2 consciousness requires something more than the self, which the next chapter on C3 consciousness will explore.

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<sup>27</sup> Percy explicitly recognizes how the left-brained exercise of writing leads to higher degrees of abstraction and radical self-consciousness, which would be interesting to compare with McLuhan’s comments on left-brained, alphabet-induced angelism (Percy, *Lost* 147-148; McLuhan and McLuhan, *The Laws of Media* Ch. 2; McLuhan and Powers 3-4). McLuhan and Ong might also suggest that the advent of print helped to foster the “picture-book world of the *en-soi*” described above (McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 273-274; Ong, *The Presence of the Word* 288-289; Percy, *Symbol and Existence* 194; cf. McLuhan and McLuhan, *Media and Formal Cause* 53-54; cf. McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 70).

<sup>28</sup> As a corollary to the aforementioned discussion of simulacra, realists deal with existence instead of its paltry substitute, a “waste product of experience” (Marcel, *I. Reflection & Mystery* 54).

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#### Chapter 4: C3 Consciousness, Redemption

The painter Caravaggio's (1571-1610) *The Calling of St. Matthew* depicts the moment when Christ calls Matthew, the tax collector. In the painting, five men gather around a small table. Three sit, while an older man and a boy stand. All five look well dressed. Christ appears in the doorway with an outstretched hand pointing in the direction of someone in the room. Who is he pointing at? A bearded man, perhaps Peter, stands by Christ's side, pointing in the same direction, imitating Christ. The two men furthest away from Christ keep their heads down, engrossed by counting the money that lies before them on the table; these two do not even see the shadowy figure at the door. Perhaps they heard someone enter, but the coins soak up their attention. An open window above Christ's faintly haloed head lets in a cone-shaped beam of light that brightens the upper half of the wall behind the group. A shutter hanging on the adjacent wall blocks part of the beam, allowing only a small stream of light to land squarely on the face of one man, who looks wide-eyed in the direction of Christ. The wide-eyed man holds up his own index finger, ambiguously pointing either at himself or at the man next to him.<sup>1</sup> That leaves three fingers hanging in midair—Christ's, Peter's, and the wide-eyed man's. If paintings could speak, this painting might ask, "Who is Christ calling here? Who is being pointed at? Is it the wide-eyed man? Is it the man counting coins? Is it you?"

In this chapter, I review C3 consciousness, or the redemption from the predicament of C2 consciousness. At the very heart of C3 consciousness lies the solemn fact that Christ is calling you, you the individual person living in a particular historical moment, much like a St. Matthew and any of the other saints. Of course, Percy mostly sought to avoid making any such direct assertions in his fiction and non-fiction about the Good News of eternal salvation. Percy

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably, *The Calling of St. Matthew* admits of multiple interpretations regarding precisely who Matthew is in the painting, whether the wide-eyed man or the man counting coins at the end of the table (Varriano 111).

preferred to take an indirect route. Why? Because most everyone knows God loves them. Everyone has heard the Good News, and having heard it, they have turned on the television to find an enthralling series on Netflix to cure their boredom (cf. Percy, *Signposts* 322-323). As Percy suggests, nowadays there is “an indifference more subversive than hostility” (Percy, *Signposts* 322). Perhaps above all, the simulacra that cloud C2 consciousness and the general cheapening of the vocabulary of Christendom make it difficult to recognize the shadowy figure on the other side of the room, the God-Man. All too often, symbolic simulacra relegate the crucifix or the Caravaggio painting to the realm of the merely “religious,” a deadly realm where it wanes in significance (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 108-109). And so, Percy sought to cloak his project in a subtle guise. Today, everyone calls out “Come!” (Percy, *The Message* 148). How, then, do you decide which voice to heed? When seemingly everyone points at you and calls out your name with a promise of a remedy for your predicament, how do you separate the wheat from the chaff? And, if you truly have a message to deliver that has eternal significance, how do you get others to listen? Thus, the first major section of this chapter defines C3 consciousness. In its true form, C3 consciousness implies conversion. Nevertheless, Percy discusses several variants of pseudo C3 consciousness, which I also review below, that allow temporary reprieve from the stifling condition of C2 consciousness. In the next section, I review how defamiliarization, which I define further below, clears away the simulacra, or the *a priori* symbolic reifications, that hinder the way to C3 consciousness. In the third main section, I review how Kierkegaard and Aquinas shaped Percy’s understanding of key components of C3 consciousness, including the relationship between faith and reason, the Church, and the sacraments. Finally, I conclude by reviewing the implications of this chapter for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

### *Defining C3 Consciousness*

In this section, I begin to unpack what Percy means by C3 consciousness. Among other things, Percy describes C3 consciousness as a modification of C2 consciousness. Percy puts the following into the mouth of the alien in *Lost in the Cosmos*: “A C3 consciousness is a C2 consciousness which has become aware of its predicament, sought help, and received it” (Percy, *Lost* 212). Recall here again the semiotic, existential “predicament” of trying to find an adequate symbol for oneself, which I reviewed in the previous chapter. The temptation faced by C2 consciousness to choose one symbol or another to prop oneself up on remains an enduring temptation for C3 consciousness. Yet, C3 consciousness has somehow come to the realization that no symbol can adequately capture who or what it is. If C2 consciousness involves a solitary self trying in vain to find an adequate symbol for itself, then C3 consciousness implies a “redemption” from this state (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 90-92). Ultimately, Percy believes that only religion, Christianity in particular, can provide the complete answer to the question “[B]ut *what am I?*” (Percy, *The Message* 284). However, Percy also outlines other secular avenues for momentarily forgetting the predicament of the self and for achieving temporary intersubjective communion (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 90-93). The problem with these secular avenues lies in their relative transience and lack of duration, which leads to what Percy calls “reentry problems.” Below, I first review true C3 consciousness, wherein the self heeds a transcendent message of salvation. Next, I describe some secular, pseudo attempts to escape the predicament of C2 consciousness. Third, I discuss the primary drawbacks of these secular attempts to escape the solitary predicament of the self, which Percy called “reentry problems.” This section lays the groundwork for the following

section, which reviews several tactics of defamiliarization that facilitate the movement toward C3 consciousness.

To begin, Percy believed that C3 consciousness escapes the maddening solipsism of C2 consciousness with the help of an apostle, or messenger. Someone arrives with “news from across the seas” bearing upon the semiotic existential predicament (Percy, *The Message* 119-149). Note well that, as a believer, Percy considers this type of religious C3 consciousness as the true answer to C2 consciousness’ predicament (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 91). Percy writes, “C3 is redemption—it’s the Good News” (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 90). Who or what are you? According to Marcel, a believer in the Good News, you are a traveler heading back to your transcendent home (Percy, *The Message* 111; Marcel, *Homo Viator* 153; Marcel, Preface to *Homo Viator*). The apostle answers the semiotic, existential question—“[B]ut *what am I?*”—and the Church transmits the answer throughout the ages via apostolic succession (Percy, *The Message* 140, 149, 284). Intervention into the predicament of C2 consciousness comes from without, from a transcendent source. The apostle and the Church carry the transcendent message across space and time, to the ends of the earth and to future generations. Historically, members of the Church have used a catechism such as the Baltimore Catechism, a text filled with brief questions and answers, to help hand down the faith and instruct believers in its teachings. Question 126 in the Baltimore Catechism plainly states that the “end of man,” or the “purpose for which he was created,” is “to know, love, and serve God” (“Baltimore Catechism #3: Lesson 1”). Unlike C2 consciousness, which does not know what to do with itself, C3 consciousness has an answer: know, love, and serve God (Percy, *Lost* 211). Question 127 explains, “he [man] was created for something outside this world ....” (“Baltimore Catechism #3: Lesson 1”). The Catechism adequately addresses the human being’s

orientation towards transcendence. No matter how many immanent needs C2 consciousness has had satisfied, the itch for transcendence remains. C2 consciousness ends in a static reification of the self into one thing or another, while C3 consciousness acknowledges the centrality of relationship and communion with the Divine. Despite Percy's Catholicism, Percy identifies even a Baptist as having entered C3 consciousness (Percy, *Lost* 218). Why? Because C3 consciousness receives "news from across the seas" from a transcendent source beyond the immanent plane, too, which Christians of various denominations admit (Percy, *The Message* 119-149). The importance lies in the recognition of a timeless God entering into time, the eternal becoming historical, which Kierkegaard understood as the absurd (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 188). Before reviewing Percy's reading of Kierkegaard and Aquinas, which yields more insight into true, religious C3 consciousness, I must first characterize other, secular attempts to escape C2 consciousness.

In addition to religious (and true) C3 consciousness, Percy describes several types of secular, "quasi-C3" consciousness (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, "Interview with Walker Percy" 90-91). These secular attempts to remedy the alienation of C2 consciousness either reestablish intersubjective communion through naming or otherwise shift the focus of attention away from the self. For example, scientists act in a manner that presupposes a community of other scientists, whom they hope will understand and confirm their work (Percy, *The Message* 210). Scientific discoveries imply intersubjective communion and revelatory insight. Good scientists such as the physicist Albert Einstein or Karl von Frisch, the famous scientist who studied bees, may get so lost in their studies as to forget the predicament of C2 consciousness (Percy, *Lost* 13, 143). In addition to scientific practice, Percy explains how good art can name alienation and by so doing lead to the reversal of alienation (Percy, *Lost* 120-121; Percy, *The Message* 97). As Percy

suggests, the alienated commuter reading a novel about an alienated commuter is in better shape than his non-reading comrade (Percy, *The Message* Ch. 4). Why? Because the reading commuter has someone to share his predicament with (Percy, *Lost* 121). Percy writes, “Art reestablishes community, even if you’re reading a book alone. If it’s a great book, there is a community established between you, the writer, and the words he’s using” (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 91). A great book can articulate something hitherto unarticulated about existence (Percy, *Lost* 120). In the previous chapter, I discussed Franz Kafka’s ability to authentically name a predicament for others. Kafka could point out the alienation of living in an impersonal and frightening society, and Kafka’s readers could recognize their own plight in Kafka’s fiction. A simple one-to-one correspondence does not need to exist between a novel and a reader’s life for such a reversal to take place. Obviously, Kafka’s readers did not themselves turn into giant cockroaches like Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (Kafka, “Metamorphosis”). Perhaps you can identify with Samsa simply because others have treated you like an insect for one reason or another. Thus, the best stories operate as analogies, or symbols, that articulate a situation held in common. Through the mediation of poetry, fiction, music, and other forms of art, an alienated individual may come to recognize his or her predicament through another’s portrayal of it (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 90-91). For example, consider *The Shawshank Redemption*, a classic movie, which some consider as one of the greatest of all time, about a man wrongly incarcerated for the murder of his wife. Life admits of varying degrees of imprisonment and punishment that someone watching the film could identify with, even if he or she has never spent a day in prison. Even music without any lyrics can symbolize a predicament and express something about the inner life that the musician and listener share in common (Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key* 204-245; Percy, “Symbol as Need”

381-382). However, like other secular types of “quasi-C3” consciousness, the “salvific effect of art” does not endure (Percy, *Lost* 121).

In addition to the creation and reception of art, Percy highlights sports, media, recreational sex, drugs, and travel as activities for escaping the solitary predicament of C2 consciousness (Percy, *Lost* 180-181). These “modes of recreation” afford varying degrees of communion, transcendence, and self-forgetfulness in a secular age (Percy, *Lost* 180). Such “quasi-C3” alternatives lead to secular diversion rather than religious conversion (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 91).<sup>2</sup> With the possible exceptions of doing drugs and travelling, the self finds temporary respite from its isolation and once again encounters others in these activities. For example, the identification among others on a sports team and the agonism inherent to athletic contests leads one to temporarily forget the predicament of the self (Percy, *Lost* 180). For better or for worse, players and spectators alike can lose themselves in a given contest. Percy writes, “Ask a Bororo tribesman: Who are you? He may reply: I am a parakeet. (Ask an L.S.U. fan at a football game: Who are you? He may reply: I am a tiger.)” (Percy, *Lost* 11). The identification between self and other may become complete at a sporting event. The media also facilitate intersubjective transactions between otherwise isolated selves (Percy, *Lost* 180-181). Of course, some media may serve artistic ends, such as novels, albums, and the like. Other forms of media such as TV and the news, however, traffic largely in entertainment (Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*). In this historical moment, some people watch CNN, while others watch Fox News. The identification between members of the same media tribe and the antagonism toward those of a different persuasion oftentimes resembles a sporting contest, an agonistic conflict with winners and losers (Strate, *Amazing Ourselves to Death* 94-95). Percy

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<sup>2</sup> Speaking of conversion to an ethical life oriented toward real standards, Irving Babbitt once wrote, “The whole of life may, indeed, be summed up in the words diversion and conversion” (Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* 268).



never lived to see the advent of social media, but if he had, he likely would have considered it as another form of “quasi-C3” consciousness insofar as it, like other forms of media, enables the momentary establishment of intersubjective communion. Recreational sex, too, offers autonomous selves in a postreligious and therapeutic age yet another avenue for intersubjective communion. Percy writes, “A further possibility, too, for temporary redemption is making love. That provides a real, concrete, human C3 community—but again a temporary one” (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 91). By “community,” Percy means in this case the encounter of one isolated self with another. Percy describes sex as “the cheapest, most readily available and pleasurable mode of intercourse with other selves and the only mode of intercourse by which the self can be certain of its relationship with other selves ....” (Percy, *Lost* 181). Yet, Percy parodies the futility of recreational sex to inform the nothingness of C2 consciousness (Percy, *Lost* 44, 189; Percy, *The Message* 100). Like the other alternative means of escaping the predicament of the self, the transcendence experienced in recreational sex does not last. Finally, autonomous selves may do drugs or travel to find release from their alienation. The self does not necessarily escape its isolation when doing drugs but rather forgets its isolation. Drug users such as alcoholics, for example, do drugs to lose themselves (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 91). Partying today has more to do with annihilating the self and less to do with festival and the celebration of community (Percy, *Lost* 180-185). Further, Percy believes that people may travel to a new location after their current location has been devalued, used up, or consumed by the commonplace (Percy, *Lost* 148, 181, 183; Percy, *Signposts* 5). Familiarity breeds contempt, and one’s own home is no exception. All too often, new places promise new identities (Percy, *Lost* 181, 183). But, again, the exciting novelty of a new place may always wear off. Percy writes, “After a sojourn in the desert, memories of Louisiana green become

irresistible” (Percy, *Signposts* 5). Altogether, all these secular attempts to escape the predicament of C2 consciousness do not last.

The trouble with the aforementioned secular alternatives to religious C3 consciousness lies in the transience of the transcendence that they afford, which leads to what Percy calls “reentry problems” (Percy, *Lost* 121-124, 142, 146-159). The intersubjective communion achieved by scientists and artists implies “the spectacular miseries of reentry” (Percy, *Lost* 124).<sup>3</sup> What does Percy mean by “reentry problems”? Essentially, the lows of self-consciousness and alienation follow after the highs of self-forgetfulness and intersubjective communion. Everydayness sets in. Consider the case of the talented artist. Percy writes, “How do you go about living in the world when you are not working at your art, yet still find yourself having to get through a Wednesday afternoon?” (Percy, *Lost* 145). A good novelist spends several months and maybe even years working on a book, says something real and true about the human condition that others can recognize, and then perhaps wins an award for their art. But then what? What does that novelist do afterward? Similarly, someone who reads a novel or even a poem enjoys momentary transcendence (Percy, *Lost* 121). Reading a good book can alter your perception in a near miraculous way. But what next? What can compare to the exhilarating “taste of transcendence and community” experienced when creating or enjoying a work of art (Percy, *Lost* 121)? Thus, a novelist might drink to soften the blow of an ordinary Wednesday afternoon (Percy, *Lost* 123, 147-148). Altogether, scientists and artists experience intense pleasure from acquiring and conveying knowledge to others through the mediation of symbols (Percy, *Lost* 143). The quotidian nature of everyday life does not compare with the exaltation of naming and

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<sup>3</sup> Percy suggests that good scientists do not experience quite the same “reentry problems” as bad scientists (Percy, *Lost* 115). Good scientists typically appear as “absentminded” and potentially out of touch with everyday affairs in a benign sort of way, whereas bad scientists tend to oscillate more violently between scientific abstraction and embodied, communal life (Percy, *Lost* 115-119).

knowing in scientific and artistic modes (Percy, *Lost* 143). If scientists, artists, and their audiences face “reentry problems,” then, rest assured, the other ways of achieving pseudo C3 consciousness mentioned above involve “reentry problems,” albeit in a perhaps more intense, unconscious way. People develop a hunger, an addiction, even, for sports, media consumption, recreational sex, drugs, and travel. The self may turn to these activities more and more to assuage the unspeakability of the self. But the self always remains as a leftover following each transcendent episode. All attempts to escape the predicament of the self by secular means cannot but end in despair, whether the self becomes conscious of his or her despair or not. Thus, Percy suggests only one “viable mode of reentry”: religious conversion (Percy, *Lost* 156-157, 159).

Percy suggests in *Lost in the Cosmos* that Kierkegaard and Pascal recognized religious conversion as the only possible way to escape C2 consciousness and to reenter the concrete world of place and time despite the “strange abstractions of the twentieth century” (Percy, *Lost* 156-157). In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard writes, “Faith is: that the self in being itself and in willing to be itself is grounded transparently in God” (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* 132). The word “transparently” is a key word for Percy here (Percy, *Lost* 156-157). Percy describes Simone Weil, Martin Buber, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as exemplary souls who “have become themselves transparently before God and managed to live intact through difficult lives” (Percy, *Lost* 157). This does not necessarily mean that those who live “transparently before God” live sinless lives. Only, such souls have no need to resort to semiotic disguises to cover over their own nothingness (Percy, *Lost* 152-154). Such individuals have established their integrity in God. Percy does not appear to cite any particular passage from Pascal when Percy mentions Pascal alongside Kierkegaard in *Lost in the Cosmos* (Percy, *Lost* 156-157). Nevertheless, Pascal in his *Pensées* identifies the futility of all attempts to find happiness outside of God. Even the suicide

desires happiness when taking his own life (Pascal 45; Percy, *Lost* 155-156). Pascal writes, “[T]his infinite abyss [in man] can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself [sic]” (Pascal 45). Nothing can satisfy the longing for the eternal in the human heart save for the eternal itself.

Thus, in this section, I have provided a basic description of C3 consciousness. I began by suggesting that C3 consciousness recognizes its predicament and seeks help from beyond itself. In religious terms, C3 consciousness heeds the Good News of a messenger, or apostle. Next, I reviewed some secular ways that the self momentarily escapes the predicament of C2 consciousness: science, art, sports, media, recreational sex, drugs, and travel. Please note that these secular avenues of transcendence do not constitute an exhaustive list of options open to C2 consciousness for trying to escape its predicament. Violence and war offer a perverse kind of community and self-forgetfulness (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 22; Percy, *Lost* 157, 191-192; Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 97). Percy also thought of psychoanalysis as a secular avenue for escaping the predicament of the self, “a kind of redemption” that can lead to a “quasi-community” between the patient and analyst (Percy as qtd. in Hobson, “Interview with Walker Percy” 93-94). Nevertheless, I insisted upon the transience of these secular attempts at C3 consciousness, which lead to “reentry problems.” Ultimately, Percy understands true C3 consciousness as religious in nature. Someone who has moved on to C3 consciousness has recognized that something has gone awry in the human condition, indeed, in his or her very own life, and thus admits that he or she requires help (Percy, *Lost* 215, 262). At least two difficulties stand in the way of going the religious route in this historical moment (Percy, *Lost* 156-157). First, the obnoxiousness of some religious believers turns others away from conversion (Percy, *Lost* 156-157). Percy has no sympathy for “media preachers” or

televangelists with “blown-dry hairdos” (Percy, *Lost* 157, 180). The irony of certain religious appeals lies in the fact that they all too often accomplish the opposite of their intended effects. The billboard on the side of the road threatening Hell perhaps makes more unbelievers than believers (Percy, *Signposts* 180). Second, scientists often posit God as simply one more entity among entities immanent within the cosmos (Percy, *Lost* 156). Yet, God is not a being immanent within the cosmos but rather existence itself (Aquinas, *Summa* I. Q4. Ad. 2; Exodus 3:14 DRA). God is not *a* being but rather the perfect and subsistent ground upon which everything else depends upon in order to be. Despite its manifold usefulness in other spheres of life, the objective and empirical scientific method cannot grasp this notion of God as the ground of all existence. Above all, then, C3 consciousness implies the recovery of existence from symbolic simulacra, which I discussed in the previous chapter as sealing off the splendor of the other and of God from the solitary self. Indeed, symbols often intervene, blocking the path to religious conversion and C3 consciousness. In the following section, I outline some of the ways that Percy hints at for shattering the veil of symbolically induced ignorance and thus encountering existence once more.

### *Defamiliarization and the Recovery of Existence: Shattering the Symbolic Simulacra*

In this section, I describe several ways of overcoming the symbolic roadblocks that bar the way to religious C3 consciousness. In particular, I review several tactics of “defamiliarization,” which help to constitute Percy’s art of symbolic mediation, or his theory of rhetoric. Percy lays out several tactics for piercing through *a priori* symbolic reifications, or simulacra, which prevent existence from appearing to the solitary self. First, I begin by tracing the term “defamiliarization” to Victor Shklovsky, a Russian literary theorist that influenced

Percy. Second, I discuss several tactics that Percy discusses and employs for defamiliarizing: art and ordeal. Paradoxically, art uses symbols to undermine already calcified symbolic constructions. During an ordeal, on the other hand, the “recalcitrance” of reality itself impinges upon *a priori* symbolic reifications (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 255-261). Third, I suggest here that Percy used defamiliarization for religious ends. Percy did not create “art for art’s sake” (Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins* 85, 233-234, 300, 464-465; Tolson, Introduction to *The Correspondence of Shelby Foote & Walker Percy* 3). Rather, in my estimation, Percy wrote as a moralist, a propagandist, and above all a rhetorician intent on concealing his artifice (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1404b36, 1417b8; Percy as qtd. in Bunting 41; Percy as qtd. in King 89; Percy, *The Message* 118; Percy, *Signposts* 181). In a 1962 letter to Caroline Gordon, a fellow novelist who advised Percy about the writing process, Percy states, “Actually I do not consider myself a novelist but a moralist or a propagandist” (Percy as qtd. in Tolson, *Pilgrim* 300).<sup>4</sup> In a 1974 interview with Barbara King, Percy says, “I’ve always been a polemicist and a moralist. I mean moralist in a large sense, of saying this is the way the world *ought* to be and not the way it is” (Percy as qtd. in King 89). True, Percy once denied having a “vocation” to “preach the Christian faith in a novel” (Percy, *The Message* 111). But Percy qualified this denial of a religious “vocation” by insisting on how his Christian worldview, with its assumptions about human nature and human destiny, remained central to the novels that he wrote (Percy, *The Message* 111). Above all, Percy seems to have shuddered at the thought of writing something overtly preachy (Tolson, *Pilgrim* 464-465). Instead, Percy wrote his novels and *Lost in the Cosmos* in a way that hinted at the sublime, transcendent truth of C3 consciousness. As I show below, many of Percy’s novels end by gesturing toward the importance of the sacraments, outward signs

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Gordon’s role as a sounding board for Percy’s fiction, see Tolson, *Pilgrim* 219-222.

instituted by Christ that give grace (“Baltimore Catechism #3: Lesson 13”). Like a good rhetorician aware of his audience’s presuppositions, Percy went to great lengths to take an indirect approach, using subtle tactics of defamiliarization to move his audience toward C3 consciousness (cf. Lawson, “Walker Percy’s Indirect Communications”).<sup>5</sup> Despite the religious motivations behind Percy’s work, secular readers may nevertheless find Percy’s tactics of defamiliarization of interest. These tactics of defamiliarization may contribute to the temporary amelioration of the existential states mentioned in the previous chapter, including boredom, “everydayness,” and alienation. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the reader to remember that, for Percy, such amelioration does not last and eventually leads to “reentry problems,” which I describe further below. The discussion of defamiliarization here lays the groundwork for the following section that compares Kierkegaard and Aquinas, wherein I round out the discussion of C3 consciousness.

“Defamiliarization” refers to the process of recovering existence from the veil of simulacra, the symbolic reifications at one remove from reality.<sup>6</sup> I use the term broadly here to describe both the symbolic and non-symbolic means for accomplishing such a recovery. Percy

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<sup>5</sup> After noting the tension between Percy the artist and Percy the propagandist, Quinlan adds, “My argument is that [Percy] the propagandist is present more than has been generally acknowledged to date and that what Lewis Lawson has referred to as his [Percy’s] ‘indirect communications’ are, in fact, relatively ‘direct,’ at least in the years after Percy has become successful and is no longer under the exacting editorial eye of Stanley Kauffman (see Lawson, *Following Percy: Essays on Walker Percy’s Work* [Troy, N.Y., 1988], 4-40)” (Quinlan 86n3). Quinlan rightfully acknowledges Percy as a propagandist; though I believe that Percy may have had other reasons for taking an indirect approach, which I unpack further below. Namely, Percy recognized how the devaluation of the language of Christendom and the disposition of his already evangelized audience made it very difficult to communicate with them directly (Percy, *Signposts* 322; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 108).

<sup>6</sup> Lemon and Reis translate Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* as “defamiliarization,” whereas Sher translates *ostranenie* as “enstrangement” (Gratchev and Mancing 89n1; Lemon and Reis in a note preceding Shklovsky’s “Art as Device” 4; Sher, “Translator’s Introduction: Shklovsky and the Revolution” p. xviii-xix). Note that Sher deliberately writes “enstrangement” not “estrangement.” Sher indicates that Shklovsky himself had coined a neologism and so feels inclined to follow in Shklovsky’s footsteps and to coin a neologism of his own. For the sake of this dissertation, I use the term “defamiliarization” because it keeps with Percy’s usage. Interestingly, Sebeok suggests that Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* relates to Bertolt Brecht’s German word *Verfremdung*, which translates to “alienation” (Sebeok as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 176).

himself described both art and ordeal as two options for breaking the simulacra and encountering being as being (Percy, *Lost* 105; Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 68-69). Percy learned about the term “defamiliarization” from the Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984) (Percy, *Lost* 105). In the last decade of his life, Percy took a greater interest in Shklovsky’s writings, as Percy’s letters to the semioticians Kenneth Laine Ketner and Thomas Sebeok attest (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 26, 68-69, 174-177, 180-181). In a 1986 letter to Sebeok, only a few years before Percy’s death in 1990, Percy explains how Shklovsky “is onto something with his notion of the evolution and ‘devolution’ of the esthetic symbol, and an esthetic device which he calls *priëm ostrannenja* which Eco translates as the ‘device for making strange,’ others as ‘fresh.’” (Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 174).<sup>7</sup> In the first chapter of this dissertation, I briefly mentioned Shklovsky and his idea about how art can unsettle the taken for granted perception of reality (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12-13). Good art can puncture through the symbolic simulacra to “make the stone *stony*” again (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12). The symbol once again operates as a conduit to mediate existence, which temporarily liberates C2 consciousness from the thingified world of “being-in-itself.” According to Percy, Shklovsky understood the “devaluation” of the symbol that occurs in C2 consciousness and its subsequent “renewal,” or defamiliarization, through art (Percy, *Lost* 105; Percy as qtd. in Samway, *Thief* 180). Though Percy learned about the term “defamiliarization” and Shklovsky’s theories later in life, Percy had long written about how art and ordeal can restore the sense of existence (Percy, *The Message* 83-100; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 110). Shklovsky merely articulated for Percy what Percy had already thought about the power of art and ordeal to slough off the simulacra and recover being.

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<sup>7</sup> Eco refers to Shklovsky’s “*priëm ostrannenja*,” or “the ‘device for making strange,’” in his *A Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 264).



Like Percy, Shklovsky believed in the power of art to transform and enliven the ordinary perception of reality. Art renders the commonplace uncommon and the mundane magnificent. In short, art defamiliarizes experience. Shklovsky suggests that, by nature, perception becomes automatic and habituated (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 11-12). Shklovsky invites his readers to consider the first time that they wrote with a pen or spoke in a foreign language (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 11). Undertaking these activities for the first time may induce a certain amount of discomfort, but over time you gradually learn to use a pen and speak a language with greater facility and ease. Given enough time, speaking a language becomes second nature, tacit, and taken for granted (Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* 17-18, 29, 45).<sup>8</sup> In many ways, the automatization of perception makes life easier (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 224-225; Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 11-12). Consider the case of typing on a computer. Imagine having to relearn your “home row” keys every time you sat down to type. The “hunt and peck” method of visually finding each key one at a time, a less economical way of typing than using the “home row” keys, puts the typist at a disadvantage. Arguably, the complexity of reality demands some level of habituation and automatization. Thus, for better or for worse, *a priori* symbolic constructions, the simulacra, help us to contend with day-to-day life. Art, however, deliberately upsets the ease and facility with which we process reality. Shklovsky writes, “The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar,’ to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12). In other words, art delays and disrupts the automatic recognition of familiar objects or

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<sup>8</sup> Reading in foreign languages can invite defamiliarization. Eric McLuhan relates that his father, the media ecologist Marshall McLuhan, used to read the New Testament every morning in several different languages (Eric McLuhan, Introduction to *The Medium and the Light* p. xxi). Reading a passage in Hebrew, Greek, or Latin can invite renewed appreciation for the many layers of meaning contained therein.

events (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 13, 19, 20, 21). In “Art as Device,” Shklovsky sets forth several different artistic tactics for delaying and disrupting the automatism of perception, including using a different rhythm or language (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 22-24).<sup>9</sup> Withholding the commonplace name for something and instead naming “corresponding parts of other objects” also contributes to defamiliarization (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 13). Shklovsky uses an example from one of Tolstoy’s stories to illustrate this point. Tolstoy writes about the act of stripping someone, throwing him to the floor, and lashing his backside with birch rods. In this case, Shklovsky suggests how Tolstoy described flogging as if seeing it for the first time, which contributes to its defamiliarization (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 12-13; Tolstoy, “Shame”). The description of what was then a commonplace yet humiliating practice has a powerful effect on the reader (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 13; Tolstoy, “Shame”). Finally, a change in perspective may defamiliarize, too. Shklovsky gives the example of Tolstoy’s use of perspective in the story “Kholstomer,” wherein Tolstoy examines the nature of private property through the point of view of a horse (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 14-15). In this story, the horse reflects upon what it means for something to belong to another, which indirectly invites the reader to consider the nature of private property (Tolstoy, “Kholstomer” 449-450). Regarding the use of a new perspective to defamiliarize, consider Percy’s own novelistic approach. Like Tolstoy’s horse, Percy advocates a shift in perspective and describes his tactic of taking a “Martian view” in *The Message in the Bottle* (Percy, *The Message* 11). Percy writes, “[O]nly a

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<sup>9</sup> Shklovsky refers to poetry as “a difficult, roughened, impeded language” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 22). Prose, on the other hand, is “economical, easy, proper” (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 23). In other words, Shklovsky explains how poetry and prose differ in terms of economy and ease of use. Poetry’s “roughened” quality contributes to the defamiliarization of language, which might otherwise fall beneath the level of awareness in its prosaic form (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 22, 24).

Martian can see man as he is, because man is too close to himself and his vision too fragmented” (Percy, *The Message* 11). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy literally takes a “Martian view”: Percy has an alien actually talk to a human being about the differences between C1, C2, and C3 consciousness, among other things. The “Martian view” clears away any simulacra that might prevent Percy’s object of study, the human being, from appearing.

Words, especially, become familiar and worn out over time, which means that art can and should defamiliarize such depreciated words themselves. Words, just like any other perceptible phenomena, lose their potency through repetition and overuse.<sup>10</sup> For example, take the word “love.” For Percy, sentimental television soap operas and sappy movies, among other forms of mass media, devalue the word “love” (Percy, *Signposts* 161). The word “love” becomes a thoughtless simulacra, a word degraded through its unreflective application to nearly everything and anything.<sup>11</sup> Other commonly used, yet cheapened words include “truth, beauty, brotherhood of man, life, and so on” (Percy, *Signposts* 161). Even the most vulgar of curse words lose their “semantic charge” through careless repetition (Percy, *Lost* 191). In *Lost in the Cosmos*, Percy thoroughly defamiliarizes the term “self.” The final lines of the book come from an alien who asks, “Are you conscious? Do you have a self? Do you know how you are?” (Percy, *Lost* 262). Perhaps most importantly for Percy, religious words such as “God,” “grace,” “sin,” “redemption,” “salvation,” “Jesus,” and even “religion” itself have been devalued (Percy,

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<sup>10</sup> Percy explains how Heidegger and Marcel dealt with the problem of simulacra and the devaluation of words. Percy writes, “Being is elusive; it tends to escape, leaving only a simulacrum of symbol. ... This is why new names must be found for being, as Heidegger thinks, or the old ones given new meaning, as Marcel thinks” (Percy, *Signposts* 135). Consider here Heidegger’s intimidating array of neologisms and concatenated strings of words: Dasein, being-in-the-world, etc. (Heidegger, *Being and Time*). For his own part, Marcel sought to give new meaning to old terms such as “being” and “having” (Collins 155-160).

<sup>11</sup> The Christian apologist C. S. Lewis defamiliarizes the word “love” in his book *The Four Loves*, which reviews four Greek understandings of love: *storge* (affection), *philia* (friendship), *eros* (erotic love), and *agape* (self-sacrificing love) (Lewis, *The Four Loves*). Arguably, Lewis’ use of Greek terminology circumvents the simulacra that have formed around the notion of love and allows for new meaning to emerge.

*Signposts* 180, 306). Percy explains that religious words have become “worn smooth as poker chips” (Percy, *The Message* 116). Religious words no longer reveal anything about the underlying sacred dimension that they refer to. The religious poet and novelist, then, have the job of reanimating religious language. Percy writes, “One of the tasks of the saint is to renew language, to sing a new song” (Percy, *Signposts* 306). Psalm 91 reads, “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps 96:1 NABRE). Percy believes that the Psalmist provides insight into the importance of coining new words (Percy, as qtd. in Bunting 41). Given the devaluation of religious language in the postmodern world, Percy asks. “How does he [the Christian novelist] set about writing, having cast his lot with a discredited Christendom and having inherited a defunct vocabulary?” (Percy, *The Message* 118). Elsewhere, Percy replies to his own question: “He [the Christian novelist] must use every ounce of skill, cunning, humor, even irony, to deliver religion from the merely edifying” (Percy, *Signposts* 306). Percy knew that the “merely edifying” would have no effect on his audience. Percy writes, “The fictional use of violence, shock, comedy, insult, the bizarre, are the everyday tools of his [the novelist’s] trade” (Percy, *The Message* 118). Percy notes how Flannery O’Connor portrays “baptism” through its exaggeration in *The Violent Bear It Away* (Percy, *The Message* 118). Many today might consider “baptism” as on par with “taking the kids to see Santa” (Percy, *The Message* 118). O’Connor, on the other hand, depicts “baptism” through death by drowning (O’Connor, *The Violent Bear It Away*). O’Connor’s fictional use of violence jolts the reader back into a religious mode in a most unconventional way.<sup>12</sup> Beyond the fictional use of violence, satire can defamiliarize, too. Percy writes, “There may be times when the greatest service a novelist can do his fellow man is to

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<sup>12</sup> Even though Percy condones the fictional use of violence, Percy rejects the pornographic and sexually explicit (Percy, *Signposts* 214). The pornographic, which uses stimuli to elicit a response, operates on the dyadic plane as opposed to the symbolic, triadic plane (Percy, *Signposts* 362-363).

follow General Patton's injunction: Attack, attack, attack. Attack the fake in the name of the real" (Percy, *Signposts* 161). The satirist, above all, attacks in a deliberately subversive way. Nevertheless, Percy rejects satire as a destructive enterprise and instead insists that "Satire is always launched in the mode of hope" (Percy, *Signposts* 182). Why? Because satire always "attacks one thing in order to affirm another" (Percy, *Signposts* 182). For example, Percy satirizes the self-help genre in *Lost in the Cosmos* for the sake of really helping others.<sup>13</sup> For all of its splendor, the scientific method cannot help you find out who you are. With the assistance of a talking extraterrestrial, Percy aims to move his readers toward a recognition of the limits of the scientific method as well as their own predicament.

Ordeal, catastrophe, disaster, and crisis can also defamiliarize. Percy describes the alienated commuter who has a heart attack on the train and then sees his own hand "for the first time" with "wonder and delight" (Percy, *The Message* 4, 41, 60, 88, 109). Percy also repeatedly uses the example of Prince Andrei from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, who wondered at the grandeur of the clouds while lying wounded after combat (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 110; Percy, *The Message* 41, 99; Tolstoy, *War and Peace* 164-167). Percy explains how disaster clears away "the simulacrum of everydayness and of consumption" (Percy, *The Message* 60). Even "bad news" of a catastrophe has a way of recalling the recipient of it back to reality (Percy, *Lost* 60; Percy, *The Message* 20). Percy's description of the recovery of existence through ordeal resonates with the reader's phenomenological experience. Why do people remember *exactly* what they were doing when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor or when terrorists drove planes into the World Trade Center on 9/11 (Percy as qtd. in Tolson, *The Correspondence of Shelby*

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<sup>13</sup> Percy also wrote *Love in the Ruins* as a satire. The futuristic setting of *Love in the Ruins* allows Percy to caricature the worldviews of his historical moment, including those of the political left and right. Percy writes, "It [the futuristic novel] gives you a chance to speak to the present society from a futuristic point of view. Then you can exaggerate present trends so that they become noticeable and more subject to satire" (Percy as qtd. in Bunting 45).

*Foote & Walker Percy* 269; Percy as qtd. in Olesky 81; cf. Percy, *Lost* 58)? On September 11, I recall watching the burning buildings on a small television set in Mr. Hoover's seventh grade classroom before being driven home by a family friend. Where were you? And why does memory become so vivid, distinct, and concrete when recalling a disaster (Percy, *Lost* 57-58)? Why does reality seem more real during a crisis? Even getting shot at can "dispense" someone from the commonplace (Percy, *Lost* 62-63). Percy's novel *The Second Coming* begins with an alienated suburbanite taking a bullet while standing in his own garage (Percy, *The Second Coming* 15-21). Percy explains how Will Barrett, the protagonist, lay on the garage floor after getting hit, "speculating on the odd upsidedownness of the times, that on a beautiful Sunday in old Carolina, it takes a gunshot to restore a man to himself" (Percy, *The Second Coming* 18). Suffering, pain, and even nausea can "knock everything else out of one's head, lofty thoughts, profound thoughts, crazy thoughts, even lust" (Percy, *The Second Coming* 223). Ordeal takes individuals out of themselves, for better or for worse, momentarily ending the solitary preoccupation with the self. Indeed, an ordeal often serves as a *kairotic*, or opportune, moment to realize some sublime truth about the human predicament.

Thus, Percy put both art and ordeal in the service of moving others toward C3 consciousness. Percy believes that the novelist can make "vicarious use" of catastrophe to bring readers to themselves (Percy, *The Message* 118). The apocalyptic novel functions as a supremely effective tool for rendering the commonplace unfamiliar because it combines the defamiliarizing tactics of art and ordeal. Note well that the etymology of the word "apocalypse" implies an uncovering or disclosure ("Apocalypse"). What gets peeled away in an apocalyptic event? The simulacra. What gets revealed through ordeal? Existence itself. Percy's *Love in the Ruins* takes place in a postapocalyptic scenario, where the vines have begun to sprout and overtake the

buildings (Percy, *Love in the Ruins* 9, 88, 115). *Love in the Ruins* begins with an account of how the psychiatrist protagonist Tom More treats one of his patients, Ted Tennis, for “angelism,” the abstracted and aloof state of solitary C2 consciousness (Percy, *Love in the Ruins* 32-37). In order to cure Ted of “angelism,” More has Ted walk through a swamp in order to get home, instead of having Ted take the commonplace commuter route. Ultimately, Ted’s ordeal clears away the simulacra for the better and takes him out of his abstracted state of mind (Percy, *Love in the Ruins* 37). In *Love in the Ruins*, Percy attempts to reanimate the word “love,” which has been cheapened and devalued over time, by depicting love in the ruins of a postapocalyptic world.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Percy’s novel *Lancelot* seeks to restore meaning to the word “sin” (Percy, *Lancelot* 52, 138; Percy, *Signposts* 383). Though written in a far more serious tone than *Love in the Ruins*, *Lancelot* bristles with a sense of the apocalyptic. For example, Lancelot, the main character, compares the revelation that his wife has been cheating on him and that another man has fathered his daughter to a scientist who has discovered that an asteroid will strike earth (Percy, *Lancelot* 19-20, 27-33). The knowledge rocks Lancelot to his core. Later in the book, Lancelot prophesies, “This country [the US] is going to turn into a desert and it won’t be a bad thing” (Percy, *Lancelot* 156). In *Love in the Ruins*, the world goes to ruins. In *Lancelot*, the main character’s life goes to ruins (Percy, “Questions They Never Asked Me” 179-180). In both cases, the catastrophic has a way of rendering reality more real. Both novels end by implying the significance of the most concrete and real of all phenomena for Catholics: the sacraments. According to Catholic tradition, the seven sacraments include baptism, holy orders, holy matrimony, confirmation, extreme unction (or anointing of the sick), confession, and the eucharist (“Baltimore Catechism #3: Lesson 13”). *Love in the Ruins* ends with a depiction of ordinary, domestic life in a marriage

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<sup>14</sup> Percy describes “ruin” as an exemplary “word-soul,” a pleasurable word worth savoring for itself (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 225).

(Percy, *Love in the Ruins* 402-403). *Lancelot*, on the other hand, hints at the importance of holy orders. By the end of *Lancelot*, the priest, who has hitherto remained silent, finally begins to speak. Lancelot asks the priest, “Is there anything you wish to tell me before I leave?” The priest replies, “Yes,” and the novel ends (Percy, *Lancelot* 257). Only the priest as a priest, and not as a psychiatrist or anything else, can possibly help Lancelot at the end of Lancelot’s confession (Percy, *Lancelot* 4-5, 11). Only a priest has both the authority to preach the Good News and to grant absolution to Lancelot, provided that Lancelot expresses true contrition for his evil deeds. O’Gorman notes how the novel ends with “a real dialogue and therefore the possibility that Lance’s encounter with Percival [the priest] might become a saving confession after all” (O’Gorman 140). Despite the heinous deeds that Lancelot has committed, Lancelot does not lie beyond all hope (Percy, *Signposts* 385-386). In addition to *Love in the Ruins* and *Lancelot*, Percy has a way of leaving the reader with a sense of the importance of the sacraments in his other novels, too. *The Last Gentleman*, for example, involves a character receiving the sacrament of baptism near the end of the novel (Percy, *The Last Gentleman* 405-407). In the last few pages of *The Moviegoer*, the reader learns that Lonnie, the main character Binx Bolling’s half-brother, received extreme unction before passing away (Percy, *The Moviegoer* 240). Thus, Percy’s novels suggest the importance of the sacraments without explicitly stating as much. The “aesthetic limitations of the novel form” and the devaluation of the language of Christendom in this historical moment prevent any sort of direct utterance about the truths of revealed religion (Percy, *Signposts* 386).

Altogether, Percy uses tactics of defamiliarization to recover existence from the simulacra and to restore a sense of the transcendent. In this section, I began by reviewing the place of Viktor Shklovsky in Percy’s thought. Next, I discussed symbolic and non-symbolic



tactics of defamiliarization: art and ordeal. Third, I suggested that Percy combined art and ordeal in his novels to move audiences toward C3 consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Non-religious individuals may seek to find value in the tactics of defamiliarization for their own sake. Nevertheless, the revelation of being that occurs after the simulacra have vanished may induce horror rather than joy. Catching sight of your own hand, “which can only be called a revelation of being,” results in either wonder or revulsion, depending on your religious persuasion (Percy, *The Message* 109). In distinction to the awestruck commuter, Percy explains how the atheist Sartre’s character Roquentin notices his hand with disgust (Percy, *The Message* 109).<sup>16</sup> Further, with regard to the non-religious pursuit of defamiliarization, “reentry problems” will always accompany art and ordeal when individuals pursue these things as ends in themselves. The quest for sheer artistic transcendence of the human predicament may end in aestheticism and “art for art’s sake.” As with art, people can chase the transcendent highs of ordeal for its own sake, too. Think for a moment of free solo rock climbing, an extreme sport where climbers ascend rock faces without any safety gear. Free solo rock climbers like Alex Honnold climb hundreds of feet into the air without anything to catch them. Why on earth would someone put themselves on the edge of death in this way? Without question, the proximity and possibility of death revivifies experience. War stands as another example of ordeal that can result in the recovery of existence (Percy, *Lost*

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to art and ordeal, Percy hints at other tactics of defamiliarization that I did not cover above, including apprenticeship to a great figure. According to Percy, the great figure, such as a true scientist or artist, disdains specialist jargon and instead takes a sincere interest in the object of study (Percy, *The Message* 60-61). In other words, the great figure attends more to existence itself than simulacra, the symbolic constructions at one remove from reality.

<sup>16</sup> Percy suggests that Roquentin noticed that his hand looked like a “great fat slug with red hairs” (Percy, *The Message* 109). While I found no reference to a “slug” in *Nausea*, Sartre does have Roquentin compare his hand to a crab (Sartre, *Nausea* [trans. Lloyd Alexander] 98-99). Further, Roquentin’s reflections on his hands begins the novel. Roquentin writes in his journal, “[T]here is something new about my hands, a certain way of picking up my pipe or fork” (Sartre, *Nausea* [trans. Lloyd Alexander] 4). And a short bit later in the same journal entry, Roquentin reflects, “This morning in the library, when the Self-Taught Man came to say good morning to me, it took me ten seconds to recognize him. I saw an unknown face, barely a face. Then there was his hand like a fat white worm in my own hand. I dropped it almost immediately and the arm fell back flabbily” (Sartre, *Nausea* [trans. Lloyd Alexander] 4).

44, 124). In the 2008 film *The Hurt Locker*, the main character, a specialist in defusing bombs, struggles with “reentry problems” when returning home from combat. In one moment, the protagonist prevents a bomb from exploding, and in another he cleans leaves out of his gutter. Ordinary life cannot and does not compare to the thrill of defusing a bomb. Believe it or not, some escape the threat of boredom by risking life and limb. But how long can someone realistically tempt death? Ultimately, Percy suggests that people sin to escape the predicament of C2 consciousness (Percy, *Lancelot* 163-164). Violence renders the concrete infinitely real (Percy, *Lancelot* 242-243). Sex results in momentary ecstasy and transcendence (Percy, *The Last Gentleman* 279-280). But the visceral oscillations between sex and violence wreak havoc on the world and individuals’ lives (Percy, *Lancelot* 138-139; Percy, *Lost* 44, 175-192; Percy as qtd. in McCombs 200-201; Percy, *The Second Coming* 271). The soul seeking true redemption from C2 consciousness thereby needs to hear “news” relative to his or her predicament that brings the promise of enduring relief. Only someone with authority, neither a novelist nor an academic, could possibly deliver such epic news. Thus, I now turn to consider how Percy understood the role of the apostolic messenger and the gifts that he bears: the Good News and the sacraments.

#### *Kierkegaard and Aquinas: The Apostle and the “Means” of Salvation in C3 Consciousness*

Above, I noted how Percy defined a C3 consciousness as a C2 consciousness that has recognized its predicament and its need for help. Next, I suggested how art and ordeal can clear away the simulacra and open C2 consciousness up to the possibility of true, religious C3 consciousness. In this section, I discuss the role of the apostle in moving the soul toward C3 consciousness. Two philosophers influenced Percy’s understanding of the role of the apostle: Kierkegaard and Aquinas. First, I briefly explain how Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the

Danish philosopher often labeled as an existentialist, influenced Percy's thought. Kierkegaard vigorously attacked the Hegelianism and system building of his time. Like Marcel, Kierkegaard sought to combat idealism (Collins 135). I focus especially on Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, which provided Percy with insight into Kierkegaard's critique of the idealistic approach to Christianity. Second, I consider how Kierkegaard's essay "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" informed Percy's own essay "The Message in the Bottle." In "The Message in the Bottle," which appears in a collection of essays by the same name, Percy thoroughly defamiliarizes the term "news," which he considers as both a special category of communication and as a form of knowing. Third, I distinguish St. Thomas Aquinas' thought from Kierkegaard's, insofar as the former understood faith as a type of knowledge and the latter understood faith as an irrational "leap" (Kierkegaard, Introduction to *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 15; Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 76; Kierkegaard, "The Present Age" 81-82). Ultimately, Percy disagrees with Kierkegaard on the "means" of salvation, which include the sacraments and the Church. Thus, I conclude with a brief discussion on the importance of the sacraments and the Church in C3 consciousness. This dissertation began by highlighting how modern scientists may interpret events in nature in dyadic terms, as mere efficient causes, which can yield extraordinary scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, a hermeneutic that focuses exclusively on the dyadic obscures the symbolic, triadic nature of being human. Ironically, an overemphasis on the triadic can conceal the importance of dyadic events, especially in the religious sphere. Thus, I acknowledge at the end of this section the merits of understanding the sacraments as efficient causes, the "auspices other than symbolic conception" that help the self "know itself for what it is" (Percy, *Lost* 212n).

To begin, Kierkegaard had a tremendous impact on the direction of Percy's thought. As noted in the first chapter of this dissertation, Percy suggested that Kierkegaard's essay "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" had more of an influence on Percy becoming Catholic than any other writing (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 110). Kierkegaard's indirect mode of communication, his understanding of rotation and repetition, and his categories of the aesthetic, ethical, and religious shaped Percy's ideas.<sup>17</sup> Percy also indicates how the category of the "trial," which appears in the work of Kierkegaard, "absolutely transcends the objective-empirical" (Percy, *The Message* 86).<sup>18</sup> A trial, or ordeal, strips away the simulacra, as I discussed above. Percy, of course, notes the irony in a Protestant like Kierkegaard having such an impact on him, a Catholic. Percy states, "Here I am a Catholic writer living in Louisiana, and yet the man to whom I owe the greatest debt is this great Protestant theologian" (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 127). Perhaps above all, Percy appreciated Kierkegaard's critique of idealism. Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, an attack on the German idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and speculative philosophy, provided Percy with one of the primary entrances into Kierkegaard's work (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 107). At first, Percy did not quite understand the significance of Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel, but Percy later came to realize that he could extend Kierkegaard's attack on Hegel to scientism in general (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 117).<sup>19</sup> Paraphrasing Kierkegaard, Percy referred to Hegel as he who "knew everything and said

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<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed account of Kierkegaard's indirect method of communication, see Kierkegaard's *The Point of View for My Work as An Author: A Report to History* (Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as An Author*).

<sup>18</sup> For an example of "trial" in the work of Kierkegaard, see Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, which reflects on the story of Abraham's call to sacrifice his son Isaac (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*).

<sup>19</sup> Kierkegaard attacks Hegel on several fronts, and I briefly summarize two of them here. First, Kierkegaard takes issue with Hegel's rejection of the either/or, which Kierkegaard finds essential to the Christian leap of faith. Hegel writes, "Neither in heaven nor in earth, neither in the world of mind nor nature, is there anywhere such an abstract 'Either—or' as the understanding maintains" (Hegel, "The Doctrine of Essence" 147). Kierkegaard writes, "Hegel is utterly and absolutely right in asserting that viewed eternally, *sub specie aeterni*, in the language of abstraction, in pure thought and pure being, there is no either-or" (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 270). From an abstract and idealistic perspective, you can do away with the either/or. However, Kierkegaard understands faith in terms of the either/or

everything, except for what it is to be born and to live and to die” (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 109; cf. Percy, *Signposts* 188, 343). *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, written by Kierkegaard under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, appeared in 1846. According to Lowrie, the pseudonym Johannes Climacus represents a young man, not yet a Christian, contemplating how to become a Christian (Lowrie, Introduction by the Editor xiv-xvii). Indeed, the whole problem animating *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is how to become a Christian (Lowrie, Introduction by the Editor p. xiv; Kierkegaard, Introduction to *Concluding* 20). As Kierkegaard outlines in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, speculative philosophers have tended to treat the problem from an “objective,” disinterested posture (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 23-24). Thus, Kierkegaard insists on the insignificance and unhelpfulness of the objective posture in becoming Christian, while associating the life of the passionate Christian with subjectivity, inwardness, and inner transformation (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* Ch. 1). Kierkegaard writes, “Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, subjectivity is essentially passion, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one’s eternal happiness” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 33). By treating the question of how to become a Christian as something objective, the idealist

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(Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 273). Either you have faith or you do not, and in the end, you must decide one way or another (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 23). Existence insists upon the either/or, and if you do away with the either/or, you must also do away with existence (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 271). Hence, the abstract dialectician ends up trapped in his or her own mind, constantly contemplating and never deciding between two mutually exclusive propositions. Second, Kierkegaard takes issue with the skepticism baked into Hegel’s dialectical method. According to Kierkegaard, Hegelian idealism teaches the notion of truth as a product of an ongoing dialectic or “world process” as well as the relativity of truth, which, according to Kierkegaard, “cannot help any living individual” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 34n). The individual bewitched by the Hegelian method can only know the truth of preceding generations, or in retrospect, and never the truth of his or her own generation, which hinders any sort of personal commitment to the truth of Christianity (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 34n). The Hegelian dialectic presupposes that every particular, individual truth gets contradicted and subsumed into the larger whole (Loewenberg, Introduction xii-xv). As Hegel writes, “The truth is the whole. The whole, however is merely the essential nature reaching its completeness through the process of its own development” (Hegel, “Preface to Phenomenology of Mind” 16). However, you cannot decide once and for all in favor of Christianity if the world spirit keeps unfolding. Kierkegaard writes, “When the subject does not put an end to his reflection, he is made infinite in reflection, i.e. [sic] he does not arrive at a decision” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 105). Ultimately, the question remains open as to when the world historical process will actually come to an end (or if it ever will) (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 16-17). Thus, if the dialectic never ends, the individual remains trapped in inquiry without deciding.

tends to suck all of the vigor, passion, and decisiveness out of the Christian life. Indeed, speculation about the truth of Christianity does not necessarily translate to the interested “appropriation and assimilation” of Christianity (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 23). If you want to become a Christian, you must make it your own, adopt it, and act on it. The objective approach tends to delay indefinitely the decision to become Christian (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 28). The ideal of objectivity may work in other disciplines, especially the “strict scientific disciplines,” but such an objective posture cannot help with the problem of how to become Christian (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 42).<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard attacks abstract thinking because it operates “*sub specie aeterni*,” or under the aegis of eternity, while it neglects the existential, temporal, and concrete (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 75, 267, 271). In other words, Kierkegaard understood that idealism misses the “predicament of the existing individual” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 267). Percy would have likely latched onto precisely this disregard for the individual as essential to scientism. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Percy placed an extraordinary emphasis on the individual predicament. Science can understand everything under the sun except for the individual *qua* an individual. And thus, it is precisely for the individual in an existential predicament that the apostle carries “news” “from across the seas” (Percy, “The Message in the Bottle”).

Kierkegaard’s (1847) essay “The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle” differentiates between the genius and the apostle and offers a reflection on the nature of authority.<sup>21</sup> The essay begins with a critique of those who admire St. Paul for the aesthetic beauty

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<sup>20</sup> Having taken into consideration Kierkegaard’s idealistic milieu, Percy sympathized with Kierkegaard’s attack on “objectivity,” but Percy also thought that Kierkegaard’s emphasis on subjectivity tended to obscure the importance of intersubjectivity (Percy as qtd. in Dewey 119).

<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Kierkegaard’s essay appears titled with “of” at the beginning, rendering the title “Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle” (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle”). In text in this dissertation, I leave the preposition “of” out of the title to maintain the same usage as Dewey and Tolson, who have commented on the place of Kierkegaard’s essay in Percy’s thought (Dewey 110; Tolson, *Pilgrim* 174, 238).

of his writings. According to Kierkegaard, the aesthetic merit of St. Paul's writings cannot compare with that of Shakespeare or Plato. With all due respect to St. Paul, Kierkegaard suggests that the latter are geniuses, while the former is an apostle (Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference Between a Genius and An Apostle" 89-90).<sup>22</sup> Kierkegaard writes, "A genius and an Apostle [sic] are qualitatively different, they are definitions which each belong in their own spheres: *the sphere of immanence, and the sphere of transcendence ....*" (Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference" 90-91). Thus, the genius, whether scientist or artist, may acquire world-historical significance, and he or she may gain renown for what he or she says and does in this world, in the immanent realm. But, as Kierkegaard notes, an apostle "*is what he is by his divine authority*" (Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference" 91). In other words, the apostle operates in the realm of transcendence. After making this distinction between the genius and the apostle, with one corresponding to immanence and the other to transcendence, Kierkegaard moves on to a consideration of authority. What is authority? Kierkegaard writes, "*Authority is a specific quality which, coming from elsewhere, becomes qualitatively apparent when the content of the message or of the action is posited as indifferent*" (Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference" 96). To illustrate the essence of authority, Kierkegaard invites the reader to consider two different people saying the same message (for example, "go!") in the same way, except one person has authority and the other does not. When holding form and content constant, as in this hypothetical example, the "authority makes the difference" (Kierkegaard, "Of the Difference" 97). In other words, the authority functions as the determining factor in whether or not another heeds the message. Indeed, Kierkegaard suggests that people listen to geniuses not because they have authority,

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<sup>22</sup> Augustine, of course, appreciates the writings of St. Paul otherwise than Kierkegaard. According to Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine*, the reader can find eloquence in St. Paul's writings, even if St. Paul did not deliberately use rhetorical precepts in his work (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 124-125).

whether immanent or transcendent authority, but because of their intelligence and their talent to convey something in an intellectual and aesthetically pleasing manner (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 93-95, 103-104). Plato may have had “profound” things to say about immortality because he was a genius; however, compared with Christ, “poor Plato has no authority whatsoever” when it comes to speaking about immortality (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 100-103). Kierkegaard suggests that whatever Christ says about eternal life is decisive simply because He said it (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 102). Kierkegaard notes how authority in the immanent and worldly sense always remains transitory. Kierkegaard writes, “*Authority is inconceivable within the sphere of immanence, or else it can only be thought of as something transitory*” (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 97). When understood on a merely worldly and historical plane, authority cannot endure. Consider here the fate of nations. The Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) poem “Ozymandias” sums up Kierkegaard’s sentiments about the transitoriness of immanent authority fairly well: “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings, Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (Shelley). History reveals the rise and fall kingdoms and leaders in a seemingly endless succession. Nevertheless, fathers, kings, and governments can command obedience, at least on a worldly plane, not because they are geniuses but because they have authority (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 100, 104). Altogether, Kierkegaard suggests that an apostle, “who has divine authority to command both the masses and the public,” demonstrates his transcendent authority by his statement and his willingness to suffer (Kierkegaard, “Of the Difference” 105, 108). A close reading of Kierkegaard’s “The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle” sheds light on how Kierkegaard influenced Percy’s understanding of the role of the apostle in his own essay “The Message in the Bottle.”



In Percy's essay "The Message in the Bottle," Percy adopts in his own way Kierkegaard's distinction between the genius and the apostle. Indeed, Percy understands the "news" that the apostle bears as both a special category of communication and a type of real knowledge. Percy's essay begins with a hypothetical thought experiment. Imagine, Percy invites his reader, a castaway walking along the beach, picking up bottles washed up along the shore with various messages contained therein. Some bottles have universal scientific knowledge in them, like "*Water boils at 100 degrees at sea level*," whereas others have messages bearing upon the predicament of the castaway, such as "*There is fresh water in the next cove*" (Percy, *The Message* 119-126). Percy understands the former type of knowledge as knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*, or knowledge that holds good and true under the aegis of eternity, for all times and places.<sup>23</sup> Percy understands the other statement about water in a neighboring cove as "news" relevant to the predicament of the castaway (Percy, *The Message* 126-128). Now, some news may concern life on the island, which Percy considers mere "*island news*," like fresh water in a nearby cove, whereas other news may address the entire predicament of the castaway, of being stuck on an island, which Percy calls "news from across the seas" (Percy, *The Message* 143-144). Percy argues by analogy here, comparing the castaway to the fallen creature. By "news from across the seas," Percy means news from a transcendent, eternal source. In addition to the type of message contained in the bottle, Percy considers the posture of the castaway. Will the castaway read each message with an objective-minded posture? Or will the castaway assume the

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<sup>23</sup> The phrase "*sub specie aeternitatis*" appears throughout Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Lowrie notes that the phrase "*sub specie aeternitatis*" with an "s" tacked onto the end comes from Spinoza; however, in Lowrie's translation, Lowrie preserves the use of "*sub specie aeternitati*" as opposed to "*sub specie aeternitatis*" (see Lowrie's note in Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 560n). Percy, for his own part, uses the phrase "*sub specie aeternitatis*" simply to classify knowledge that holds true in all times and all places. Percy writes, "By *sub specie aeternitatis*, he [the castaway] means not what the philosopher usually means but rather knowledge which can be arrived at anywhere by anyone and at any time" (Percy, *The Message* 125). Thus, while similarities and differences might exist between Kierkegaard's, Spinoza's, and Percy's use of the term, I use it here principally in the sense that Percy did as signifying universally true knowledge.

posture proper to his or her own predicament, namely, the posture of a castaway (Percy, *The Message* 128-129)? Percy writes, “Insofar as a man is objective-minded, no sentence is significant as a piece of news. For in order to be objective-minded one must stand outside and over against the world as its knower in one mode or another” (Percy, *The Message* 129). The ability of an individual to receive news requires some awareness of his or her predicament. Percy writes, “In summary, the hearer of news is a man who finds himself in a predicament. News is precisely that communication which has bearing on his predicament and is therefore good or bad news” (Percy, *The Message* 130). Supposing that you found yourself stuck in a desert, news of water over the next sand dune would appear as good news, whereas news of diamonds nearby would make little difference in remedying your predicament (Percy, *The Message* 133-134). Percy disclaims any apologetic motive behind writing his essay; instead, he insists, “My purpose is rather the investigation of news as a category of communication” (Percy, *The Message* 140). While theological implications may follow from what Percy argues, he remains focused on the nature of communication. Percy understands “news” as “the most significant” category of communication, more significant even than communication of knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* (Percy, *The Message* 145-146). In Kierkegaardian terms, the genius communicates knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* in the sphere of immanence, whereas the apostle communicates transcendent “news from across the seas” (Percy, *The Message* 147). Thus, Kierkegaard helps Percy to understand how the genius and the apostle communicate differently. Percy also nods to Kierkegaard and other so-called existentialists for advancing an anthropology consistent with the view of man as a castaway, or fallen creature (Percy, *The Message* 145-146). However, near the end of “The Message in the Bottle,” Percy takes issue with Kierkegaard’s understanding of faith as absurd and as separate from knowledge (Percy, *The Message* 145-146). Why? Because news

constitutes its own form of knowledge, which scientific modes of knowing typically elide as insignificant. Percy writes, “Ordinary epistemology does not take account of news as a form of knowing” (Percy as qtd. in Gretlund 205). Thus, Aquinas rather than Kierkegaard provided Percy with a way for making sense of news as a form of knowing.

When it comes to reconciling faith and reason, Percy turns to Aquinas instead of Kierkegaard. Percy notes how Kierkegaard considered the Christian faith as “a setting aside of reason” and a paradox (Percy, *The Message* 145). Kierkegaard indeed repeatedly refers to the setting aside of reason in the act of faith (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 72-73, 76, 79). Two epigraphs precede “The Message in the Bottle,” one from Kierkegaard and one from Aquinas. The epigraph from Kierkegaard reads,

Faith is not a form of knowledge; for all knowledge is either knowledge of the eternal, excluding the temporal and the historical as indifferent, or it is pure historical knowledge. No knowledge can have for its object the absurdity that the eternal is the historical.  
(Kierkegaard as qtd. in Percy, *The Message* 119; Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 76)

Percy uses this passage as one of the epigraphs to “The Message in the Bottle” because it exemplifies Kierkegaard’s stance against faith as a form of knowledge. In its original context, this quote appears in a larger discussion from Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments* where Kierkegaard is explaining the relationship between the disciple and the Teacher, God Himself (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 19, 68-88). Kierkegaard distinguishes between two particular teachers, Socrates and Christ, in terms of how these two teachers relate to their students. Socrates seeks to divest himself of followers, whereas Christianity bids the disciples to cling to the Teacher (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 19, 28-29, 76-77). As Christ says

quite simply to Levi, the son of Alphaeus, “Follow me” (Mk 2:14 DRA). With regard to Christianity, Kierkegaard writes, “the object of faith is not the *teaching* but the *Teacher*” (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 77). For Kierkegaard, faith has as its object the Paradox that God took human form in the person of Christ (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 194; Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 76). Kierkegaard writes, “That God has existed in human form, has been born, grown up, and so forth, is surely the paradox *sensu strictissimo* [in the strictest sense], the absolute paradox” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* 194). The paradox of the Incarnation, the union of the historical and the eternal, realizes itself in faith (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 73, 76). Percy attributes Kierkegaard’s stance on faith as a paradox and as contrary to reason to the Hegelian milieu that Kierkegaard lived and wrote in. Percy writes, “His [Kierkegaard’s] extreme position is at least in part attributable to his anxiety to rescue Christianity from the embrace of the Hegelians” (Percy, *The Message* 145). Thus, Percy excused much of Kierkegaard’s emphasis on faith as inwardness because Percy sympathized with Kierkegaard’s plight of writing in an idealistic milieu. Percy admired Kierkegaard’s phenomenology and his “analysis of the existential predicament of modern man,” but Percy rejected Kierkegaard’s notion of faith as an absurd leap in the dark (Percy as qtd. in Gretlund 204). As Tolson notes, “Much as he [Percy] admired Kierkegaard, though, Percy rejected the Dane’s notion of the ‘leap of faith’” (Tolson, *Pilgrim* 200). Rather, Percy believed in the compatibility between faith and reason (Tolson, *Pilgrim* 200). Percy thought that Kierkegaard ranked knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* too highly and did not sufficiently value “contingent historical knowledge” like “news from across the seas” (Percy, *The Message* 145-146). Percy writes, “Yet to the castaway who becomes a Christian, it [the contingent historical knowledge of the Gospel] is not paradox but news from across the seas, the

very news he has been waiting for” (Percy, *The Message* 147). And so, instead of Kierkegaard, Percy sided with Aquinas on the reconciliation of faith and reason.

In formulating a response to Kierkegaard’s stance on faith and reason, Percy draws upon Aquinas’ *De Veritate*, Question 14, Articles 1 and 2. In Article 1, Aquinas asks, “What is belief?” (Aquinas, *Truth: Volume II: Questions X-XX* 207). In reply to his own question, Aquinas suggests that belief involves the simultaneity of discursive thought and assent. To assent means to hold firmly to one side of a set of contradictory propositions (Aquinas, *Truth* 210). Thus, following Augustine, Aquinas suggests that to believe is to think with assent (Aquinas, *Summa* II.II.2.1).<sup>24</sup> Essentially, science follows from a discursive train of reasoning that causes assent.<sup>25</sup> Aquinas writes, “One who has scientific knowledge, however, does use discursive thought and gives assent, but the thought causes the assent, and the assent puts an end to the discursive thought” (Aquinas, *Truth* 210). With regard to belief, however, assent does not follow from a discursive train of reasoning. Rather, belief follows from an act of the will, which occurs in parallel with discursive, scientific thought (Aquinas, *Truth* 210-211). The will to believe follows from the promise of eternal life (Aquinas, *Truth* 210, 216). Understanding is held “captive” by the assent to believe, but the believer can still inquire deeper into that which he or she believes, and thus the process of discursive thought continues for the believer despite the assent to believe (Aquinas, *Truth* 211; 2 Co. 10:5 NABRE). With knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*, discursive reason causes assent, whereas with “news across the seas,” or the “knowledge of faith,” “scientific knowledge and assent are undertaken simultaneously” (Percy, *The Message* 145).

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<sup>24</sup> With regard to the difference between belief and faith, Aquinas defines belief as the “internal act of faith” (Aquinas, *Summa* II.II.2).

<sup>25</sup> By “science,” Aquinas follows Aristotle’s usage of the term, which refers to certain knowledge obtained from demonstrations (Aquinas, *Summa* II.II.2.1; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 6, Ch. 3; Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* Book I, Ch. 2; Hagen).

Thus, in Percy's terminology, the castaway can both acquire knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* and receive "news from across the seas" (Percy, *The Message* 145). Question 14, Article 2 of *De Veritate* takes up the question, "What is faith?" Aquinas builds upon the apostle Paul's definition of faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [*argumentum*] of things that appear not" (Aquinas, *Truth* 213; Hebrews 11:1 DRA). The other epigraph from "The Message in the Bottle," the one from Aquinas instead of Kierkegaard, appears in this particular question from *De Veritate*, which reads, "The act of faith consists essentially in knowledge and there we find its formal or specific perfection" (Percy, *The Message* 119; Aquinas, *Truth* 220). Aquinas immediately adds, "This [the preceding statement] is clear from its object, as has been said" (Aquinas, *Truth* 220) Now, scientific knowledge has for its "object" those things that appear (Aquinas, *Truth* 217-218, 220-221; Aquinas, *Summa* II.II.Q4.Ad1). Faith, on the other hand, has for its "object" those "things that appear not" (Aquinas, *Truth* 217, 220). In other words, the knowledge of faith has for its object the promise of eternal life, which the senses cannot immediately verify. As such, faith comes through hearing (Percy, *The Message* 146; Romans 10:17 DRA). Thus, Aquinas defines faith as "a habit of our mind, by which eternal life begins in us, and which makes our understanding assent to things which are not evident" (Aquinas, *Truth* 217). In Percy's terminology, the castaway cannot immediately verify "news from across the seas" like he or she can verify knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*; nevertheless, the castaway with faith can rest content knowing that help will indeed come from across the seas (Percy, *The Message* 138). By following Aquinas and insisting on the harmony of faith and reason, Percy saves the extraordinary capacity of the symbol to mediate real knowledge. Percy also rescues the fruits of the natural sciences and theology from skepticism. Beyond his rejection of Kierkegaard's stance on faith and reason, Percy also argued for the necessity of the Catholic

Church in transmitting the “message in the bottle,” or “news from across the seas” (Percy, *The Message* 148).

Ultimately, Percy disagrees with Kierkegaard concerning the “means” of salvation (Percy, *The Message* 140, 149). The “means,” of course, include the Catholic Church and the sacraments, which themselves become available to the believer thanks to apostolic succession, or the authoritative handing down of the faith throughout the ages. In his *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard considers the transmission of the faith from Christ’s contemporaries to future generations (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* Ch. 5). Kierkegaard explains that the disciples from Christ’s time needed only to have passed on the following “words” to future successors: “We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community and finally died” (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 130). Kierkegaard suggests that the first disciples would not have had to pass on anything beyond these words because “this little advertisement, this *nota bene* on a page of universal history, would be sufficient to afford an occasion for a successor, and the most voluminous account can in all eternity do nothing more” (Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* 130-131). Percy interprets Kierkegaard here as suggesting that the first disciples needed only to hand on “the message in the bottle” itself, or the “Absolute Paradox” that God Himself became man (Percy, *The Message* 148). However, Percy notes that Kierkegaard later came to recognize the importance of the apostle and “newsbearer” “who delivers the news and who speaks with authority” in the transmission of the “news from across the seas” (Percy, *The Message* 148). Note that Kierkegaard published his *Philosophical Fragments* in 1844 and “The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle” in 1847. Percy concludes “The Message in the Bottle” by suggesting that the newsbearer brought with him not

only the “news” of “where he [the castaway] came from and who he is and what he must do” but also the very “means by which the castaway may do what he what must do” (Percy, *The Message* 149). By “means,” I interpret Percy here as referring to the Catholic Church and the sacraments, the latter of which consist of outward signs instituted by Christ that dispense grace into the soul of the believer (“Baltimore Catechism #3: Lesson 13”). Throughout the entirety of Percy’s corpus, Percy outlines the power of the symbol to mediate knowledge (as in C1 consciousness) and the dangers of symbol usage (as in C2 consciousness). In the end, sacraments, which take precedence for the Catholic in C3 consciousness, differ from mere symbols. Sacraments operate both as symbols, in the sense that Percy uses the term, and as causes. In other words, sacraments effect what they signify (Aquinas, *Summa* III.62.1; Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 226). In “Sign and Symbol,” which Percy would have read and which I discuss in Chapter 2, Maritain describes a sacrament as “something external and sensory which signifies an effect of interior sanctification to be produced” (Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 225). A sacrament of the New Law operates as an “instrumental cause,” a type of efficient cause, to effect grace in the soul (Aquinas, *Summa* III.62.1; Maritain, “Sign and Symbol” [*Ransoming the Time*] 226; “Instrumental Causality”). As an ardent defender of the inwardness of Christianity, Kierkegaard took issue with the individual who sought freedom from doubt and uncertainty in outward, sacramental rites like baptism (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 35, 35n, 42-44, 44n).<sup>26</sup> By

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<sup>26</sup> Kierkegaard writes, “When it is said that the reassuring thing in connection with baptism over against all temptations to doubt, is that in this sacrament God does something to us, the idea is naturally only an illusion, in so far as it is by this means intended to keep dialectics away” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 44n). By the term “dialectics,” Kierkegaard means challenges and questions posed by an interlocutor that may induce a believer to doubt. Kierkegaard also explains how a believer could repose in authority to keep “dialectics” away. Kierkegaard writes, “If the believer was asked about his faith, i.e. [sic] if he was dialectically challenged, he would declare with a certain easy air of confidence that he neither could nor needed to give any account of it, since his trust reposed in others, in the authority of the saints, and so forth. This is an illusion. For the dialectician has merely to shift his point of attack, so as to ask him, i.e. [sic] to challenge him dialectically to explain, what authority is, and why he regards just these as authorities” (Kierkegaard, *Concluding* 26). Note that Kierkegaard published this preceding statement in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* prior to publishing “The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle.”



contrast, the Catholic faith, which Aquinas and Percy adhered to, advances the belief in the real efficacy of the sacraments, which the apostle, no mere messenger, administers.

In this section, I read Kierkegaard alongside Aquinas to get a better understanding of how Percy understands the role of the apostle. First, I reviewed how Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* influenced Percy. Second, I discussed Kierkegaard's essay "The Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle" in light of Percy's "The Message in the Bottle." Importantly, Percy sought to classify "news" as both a real form of knowledge and a category of communication. Third, I differentiated Kierkegaard's thought from Aquinas' thought. Percy sided with Aquinas over Kierkegaard regarding the relationship between faith and reason. As a Catholic, Percy appreciated the sacraments, too, which cause grace in the soul of the believer. For Percy, the apostle comes bearing the sacraments in addition to "news from across the seas." Percy also adopted a sacramental view of reality in his novels, which Percy associates with the tradition of Aquinas more so than the Kierkegaardian tradition (Dewey 122-123; Percy as qtd. in Dewey 124). Faith unfolds in the sensible, sacramental world. Natural things have supernatural significance. Altogether, unpacking the role of the apostle in Percy's thought opens up a better understanding of C3 consciousness. Percy writes, "A C3 consciousness has managed by assistance from something other than self to recover itself from this [semiotic] mobility, through auspices other than symbolic conception, and knows itself for what it is" (Percy, *Lost* 212n). What does Percy mean by "assistance from something other than self" and "auspices other than symbolic conception"? In my estimation, though he does not explicitly say as much, Percy refers here to what he calls elsewhere the "unique Thing, the Jewish-People-Jesus-Christ-Catholic-Church" (Percy, *The Message* 140). In other words, the Church, complete with the sacraments that dispense grace, helps C2 consciousness to recover from its semiotic mobility and to know

itself for what it is, a fallen soul in need of help. The Church provides the means for *homo viator* to subsist on the journey home. When Percy first became Catholic, he said of confession: “This is one of the main reasons I’ve become a Catholic” (Percy as qtd. in Tolson, *Pilgrim in the Ruins* 204). While writing his second to last novel, *The Second Coming*, Percy began attending Mass every day (Tolson, *Pilgrim* 426). Finally, Percy received last rites from a priest before his death in 1990 (Tolson, *Pilgrim* 486). Clearly, the Church and the sacraments mattered to Percy. Nevertheless, recall that Percy never claimed to have had the authority to preach. In his 1990 essay, “Why are you Catholic?” Percy writes, “Anyhow, I do not have the authority to bear good news or to proclaim a teaching” (Percy, *Signposts* 315). If Percy did not have the authority to preach in a novel, neither have I authority to preach in a dissertation. I have sought only to lay out the differences between C1, C2, and C3 consciousness, the last of which involves a most significant category of communication: “news.” Having described and defined C3 consciousness, I can now move on to a consideration of the implications that follow from the aforementioned for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology.

### *Implications for Rhetoric, Philosophy of Communication, and Media Ecology*

In this section, I offer some implications of this chapter for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology. First, rhetoricians may find Percy’s discussion of the devaluation of words pragmatic. Percy describes how satire, a particular form of art, serves as an effective means for undermining prevalent, problematic worldviews (e.g., scientism). Second, scholars interested in the philosophy of communication could draw upon the tactics of defamiliarization outlined above to revivify the meaning of the word “communication,” a word that often gets taken for granted. Third, media ecologists may appreciate how a change in media

as well as questions can clear away problematic simulacra that cloud perception and hinder inquiry. Much of what follows in this section concerns the importance of defamiliarization in clearing away symbolic simulacra that characterize C2 consciousness. Defamiliarization creates the possibility for new discoveries, even if it does not eventually lead to true C3 consciousness.

The defamiliarizing tactic of satire described above has significant implications for those hoping to formulate religious and political rhetorical appeals in this historical moment. Mass communication technologies have devalued language, making it difficult for the religious or politically motivated rhetor to communicate meaningfully. For example, news reporters exhort their audiences that fake news endangers democracy. But what do they mean by “democracy”? Like the word “love” and the word “sin,” political words like “freedom” and “democracy” also fail to signify in this historical moment. Although many use these terms in a “eulogistic” sense, they still function like simulacra, impeding thought rather than facilitating it (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 189; Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 92-93; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 105). These *a priori* simulacra may contribute to what Kenneth Burke called “trained incapacity,” a symbolically induced blindness that prevents one from entertaining alternative modes of understanding the world (Burke, *Permanence and Change* 6-7). Following Percy’s lead, someone seeking to restore meaning to these words should resist employing them directly and should instead opt for indirect communication. Satire, especially, remains a promising indirect avenue for the rhetor with convictions to convey but no authority to convey them. Like Percy, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) noticed the efficacy of satire, irony, and the comical in a postmodern world suspicious of authoritative pronouncements. The old “proclamatory genres” of traditional authority no longer work, Bakhtin reminds us (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* 132). And yet, the inefficacy of authoritative proclamations from traditional and

hierarchical institutions does not prevent moral exhortation altogether. In a world where advertisers, Communists, and Jehovah's Witnesses clamor for attention and urge action one way or another, Percy suggests that silence itself may capture attention (Percy, *The Message* 148). In "The Message in the Bottle," Percy writes, "In such times, when everyone is saying 'Come!' when radio and television say nothing else but 'Come!' it may be that the best way to say 'Come!' is to remain silent. Sometimes silence itself is a 'Come!'" (Percy, *The Message* 148). Compare Percy's insight here with Bakhtin's insight on irony in "From Notes Made in 1970-1971." Bakhtin writes, "Irony as a form of silence. Irony (and laughter) as a means for transcending a situation, rising above it. Only dogmatic and authoritarian cultures are one-sidedly serious" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* 134). Percy might agree. To reiterate, Percy composed several satirical works, such as *Love in the Ruins* and *Lost in the Cosmos*. Imagine the irony, Percy invites his reader to consider, of a scientist who can explain everything under the sun except for what it means to be a human being. In other words, imagine a scientist who can explain everything except for the most important thing. How ridiculous! As an art form, satire defamiliarizes and invites reflection upon the taken-for-granted norms of a given society, like its pervasive scientism or technologism. Norms typically fall beneath the level of awareness, and like other objects or entities in the field of perception, individuals become habituated to them (Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* 24-25; Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* 52-53; Shklovsky, "Art as Device" [Lemon and Reis] 11-13). During periods of breakdown, crisis, or ordeal, however, these norms come to the forefront of attention (Arnett and Arneson 48-49, 57-64; Arnett, Fritz, and Bell Ch. 1; Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* 22-24). The term "postmodernity" refers to the historical moment when values and "metanarratives" have come into question (Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 13-14, 53, 216; Lyotard *The Postmodern*

*Condition*). Arguably, many of those with a postmodern orientation may question the privileged place of science in making authoritative pronouncements. Ironically, however, some postmodern critics of scientism may adopt an ironically authoritative position that exhorts in the name of anti-authoritarianism. What could be more ironic than the metanarrative that all metanarratives have collapsed? Such postmodern figures, comic to be sure, call out for satirical treatment as much as their opponents. The refusal to admit of laughter, even of oneself, among some postmodernists discloses how “one-sidedly serious” it is to some of its proponents (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 134). Percy’s insight into the efficacy of satire reflects his attentiveness to the historical moment and to his audience’s sensibilities, two important characteristics of any would-be postmodern rhetor.

Percy’s insight into defamiliarization, especially the power of ordeal to reanimate perception and words themselves, has important implications for philosophy of communication. Different philosophers have advanced different perspectives on the nature of communication (Arneson, *Perspectives on Philosophy of Communication*; Arnett and Holba, *An Overture to Philosophy of Communication*; Klyukanov, *A Communication Universe* 3-22). Some may posit communication as the transmission of a message over a channel from a sender to a receiver, while others still might consider how communication ritually shapes a world (Carey, *Communication as Culture* 14-35, 42-43; McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media* 86). It almost goes without saying that the field of communication presupposes multiple, varied approaches to the study of communication. Nevertheless, the question remains as to whether or not the word “communication” has itself become a simulacrum meriting defamiliarization. Some, like Peters, have already helped to defamiliarize “communication” by reviewing the history of the idea (Peters, *Speaking into the Air*). Further, Peters considers communication among machines,

animals, and aliens, which contributes to the defamiliarization of “communication” (Peters, *Speaking into the Air* Ch. 6). Recall that Percy used the perspective of a talking alien in *Lost in the Cosmos* to defamiliarize his object of study, the human being. In addition to perspective-taking, etymology, too, offers another way to defamiliarize “communication.” Peters explains how the words “munificent,” “community,” “meaning,” and *Gemeinschaft* relate to the root “mun” in “communication” (Peters, *Speaking* 7).<sup>27</sup> As it pertains to the power of ordeal to defamiliarize, the question becomes, what would it mean to place “communication”—like “love” and “sin”—in the ruins? Arguably, studying communication during breakdown, crisis, or apocalypse promises to revivify the word “communication,” allowing it to appear as an object of study. The crisis communication scholar may study communication before, during, and after an ordeal (Coombs, “Parameters for Crisis Communication” 25-47). Perhaps, then, the philosopher of communication has something to learn from both the crisis communication scholar as well as the novelist. The novelist, of course, has an excellent means for exploring “communication” in during breakdown, crisis, and apocalypse. In his novels, Percy frequently considers the act of communication in its breakdown. For example, Allison from *The Second Coming* struggles to communicate with others; her communication borders on the schizophrenic (Percy, *The Second* 92-94, 110, 165). Mickey LaFaye and Donna, two of Tom More’s patients in *The Thanatos Syndrome*, answer questions such as “Where is Chicago?” like robots, without relating such questions to themselves (Percy, *The Thanatos Syndrome* 1-22). The philosopher of communication has the task of preventing the word “communication” in addition to key related terms like “dialogue” and “content” from turning into mere reifications. Following Percy’s lead,

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<sup>27</sup> A fan of etymological analysis, Kylukanov uses the Latin root “munus” to reflect on communication as “mania” and as a “gift” (Kylukanov, *A Communication Universe* 51, 126). Butchart also investigates the etymological root “munus” (Butchart, *Embodiment, Relation, Community* Ch. 3).

the philosopher of communication looks more and more like a phenomenologist and a novelist than a natural scientist. Percy writes, “[T]he novelist must first and last be a good phenomenologist, and to most behavioral scientists phenomenologists are closer to novelists than to scientists” (Percy, *The Message* 186). Altogether, Percy remained committed to attending to the empirical communicative act before him (Percy, *The Message* 198).<sup>28</sup> By consequence, the philosopher of communication should keep in mind the danger of falling prey to *a priori* theoretical constructs that prevent the object of study from appearing (Percy, *The Message* 198). The practice of modern science presents many issues for the philosopher of communication, especially ignorance of the individual predicament and problematic assumptions about the nature of what it means to be human. Nevertheless, Percy never intended to reinforce the divide between positivists and existentialists (Percy, *The Message* 198). Scientism can block true inquiry from getting off the ground, but irrationalism and antiscientific prejudice can move the scholar attempting to study communication away from existence and into the realm of the simulacra (cf. Percy, *The Message* 198). Postmodern idealism, then, remains as large a hindrance as modern scientism to the philosopher trying to study communication.

With regard to media ecology, a shift in the medium as well as questioning can induce defamiliarization. Changing from one medium to another tends to disrupt the automatism of perception (Shklovsky, “Art as Device” [Lemon and Reis] 11-13). Books, in particular, can revivify the taken for granted and lead to a totally renewed perception of existence. You may have learned about George Washington during classroom lectures in grade school, but reading a good biography about Washington might cultivate in you an entirely new appreciation of the first President of the United States (Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107-109). Percy suggests that the

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<sup>28</sup> McLuhan and McLuhan, like Percy, aimed to study communication on the perceptual, empirical level (McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media* 116).

educational apparatus, complete with jargon and special pedagogical techniques, tends to obscure the existential object under consideration (Percy, *The Message* 57-60; Percy, *Signposts* 353-355; Percy, *Symbol & Existence* 107-109). In other words, the media get in the way (Percy, *The Message* 57). Changing the media, by switching from a textbook to a novel, for example, defamiliarizes. Having recognized his own lack of authority to deliver transcendent “news from across the seas,” Percy nevertheless proposed to deliver a different message in a bottle (Percy, *Signposts* 356). What was Percy’s other message in the bottle? Percy writes, “It would be very simple. One word, in fact. *Read!*” (Percy, *Signposts* 356). In his essay “Another Message in the Bottle,” Percy highlights the importance of reading (Percy, *Signposts* 352-367). The prevalence of mass media such as television and films make reading books a practical necessity, a deeper way of penetrating into a subject that other media cannot always treat of in depth or even at all. As Anton explains in “The Practice of Reading Good Books,” mass media such as television, radio, and the Internet engender “reading atrophy” (Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 5). Textbooks do not ameliorate “reading atrophy” but only tend to make it worse, deadening and familiarizing what otherwise might be an exhilarating subject (Percy, *The Message* 57; Anton, *Communication Uncovered* 4-5, 9, 12). Furthermore, in addition to the other means noted above, Percy used questions to defamiliarize the taken for granted. As Postman and Weingartner note, “Questions are instruments of perception” (Postman and Weingartner 121). In *Laws of Media*, McLuhan and McLuhan structure the tetrad of media effects around the four questions of what technology enhances, what it obsolesces, what it retrieves, and what it flips into when pushed to the extreme (McLuhan and McLuhan, Introduction to *Laws of Media* 7). Questioning removes the automatism of perception to allow new meanings to appear. Further, questions enable new ways of thinking to emerge that go beyond instrumental rationality (Heidegger, “The Question



Concerning Technology”). Percy includes a litany of questions in *Lost in the Cosmos* aimed at opening up rather than closing avenues for thoughtful reflection. Percy writes, “*Question*: What does the saleslady mean when she fits a customer with an article of clothing and says: ‘It’s you’?” (Percy, *Lost* 24). Later, Percy asks, “*Question*: Why was there no such word [boredom] before the eighteenth century?” (Percy, *Lost* 70). A number of answers follow each question, aimed at getting the reader to think for themselves in an active way. Thus, *Lost in the Cosmos* functions like what McLuhan calls “cool media,” inviting the audience to actively participate in the process of constructing meaning and understanding (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 38-50). Percy’s style in *Lost in the Cosmos*, the form of his content, aims to restore a sense of “sovereignty” to the reader, the otherwise passive consumer and denizen of a highly technological age (Percy, *Lost* 71, 74, 122; cf. Percy, *The Message* 46-63).

Thus, the study of C3 consciousness has many important implications for rhetoric, philosophy of communication, and media ecology. Rhetoricians can draw upon Percy’s insights to advance otherwise religious and political messages that oftentimes fall on deaf ears. Satire can work against those worldviews that dominate the public sphere, whether scientism or nihilism. Philosophers of communication can utilize tactics of defamiliarization to revivify the word “communication.” Media ecologists might appreciate how shifts in media and questions defamiliarize. Beyond rhetoricians, philosophers of communication, and media ecologists, communication scholars of all stripes might profit from sustained consideration of the distinction outlined above between knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis* and “news.” Do scholars in the field of communication pursue knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*, which holds good and true for all times and all places? Perhaps some social scientific approaches might, while other critical or interpretive scholars may reject the aspiration toward such universal knowledge, citing the

neglect of subjectivity, individual experience, and issues of power. For his own part, Percy sought to give both universal knowledge and subjectivity their due. Water really does boil at 100 degrees at sea level. But that knowledge alone is not enough to get you through a Wednesday afternoon. No, human beings find themselves in particular predicaments. Indeed, life itself may well be one gigantic predicament. Provided that that is the case, communication scholars might come to acknowledge “news” as a legitimate category of communication and form of knowledge.

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